

WEEKLY FREE NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR



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# Kent on Sunday

www.kentnews.co.uk December 6, 2015

North & West edition No 689

## HEALTH

### Drug deaths are shooting up

Multi-agency approach to tackle growing problem

## THEATRE

### Review: City's panto Snow White

Is popular production a hit or a miss?

## CONFLICT

### MPs back Syria strikes

But concerns continue over the effectiveness of such action

## PROPERTY

### Scheme to transform our town centres

No Use Empty could soon play role in putting homes in high streets

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# Kent on Sunday

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## Transforming buildings is a win-win for us all

IT IS the easiest thing in the world to assume the county's housing problems are being tackled purely by the relentless building of new homes on our green and pleasant land.

What's more, it's hard to escape that theory when you look at the rate of change in almost all our towns, and indeed villages, over recent years.

But sometimes there are projects which seek to deliver the same goal but rather than, in the views of many, spoiling our landscapes, they actually enhance them.

No Use Empty tackles exactly what it says on the tin. It teams up with owners of properties that have stood deserted for months and transforms them for the greater good. Eyesores are made landmarks, run-down sites made homes. Everyone benefits.

Inside this edition we take a look at the project as it celebrates its 10th anniversary. So



Editor **Chris Britcher**

successful it has become, in fact, that it has sold both the concept and branding to other parts of the country.

And if you're still thinking 'well that doesn't impact on me' well just consider that for each building turned into homes, it means a corresponding reduction in the number of new homes built elsewhere. And that is something few will argue against.

On a more sombre note, the debate over air attacks on Syria has raged all week and will continue to do so. It's not often you feel a sympathy for

our MPs, but the argument both for and against the motion were compelling and many found they sought a combination of options not on the table. It's easy for us to come to our own conclusions, but the ones they reach are a question of life or death. And that was reflected in the quandary many found themselves in. We take a look at their views inside.

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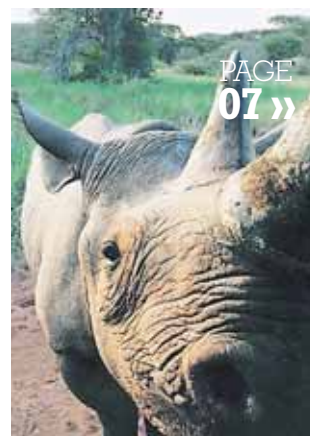
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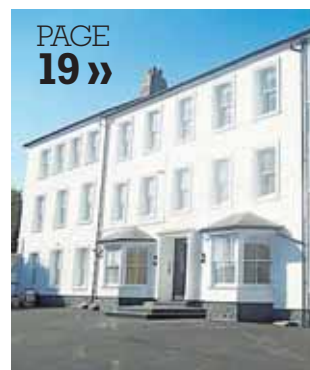
Hit punk band vow to stop the show if women are groped



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OPENS THIS WEEK!

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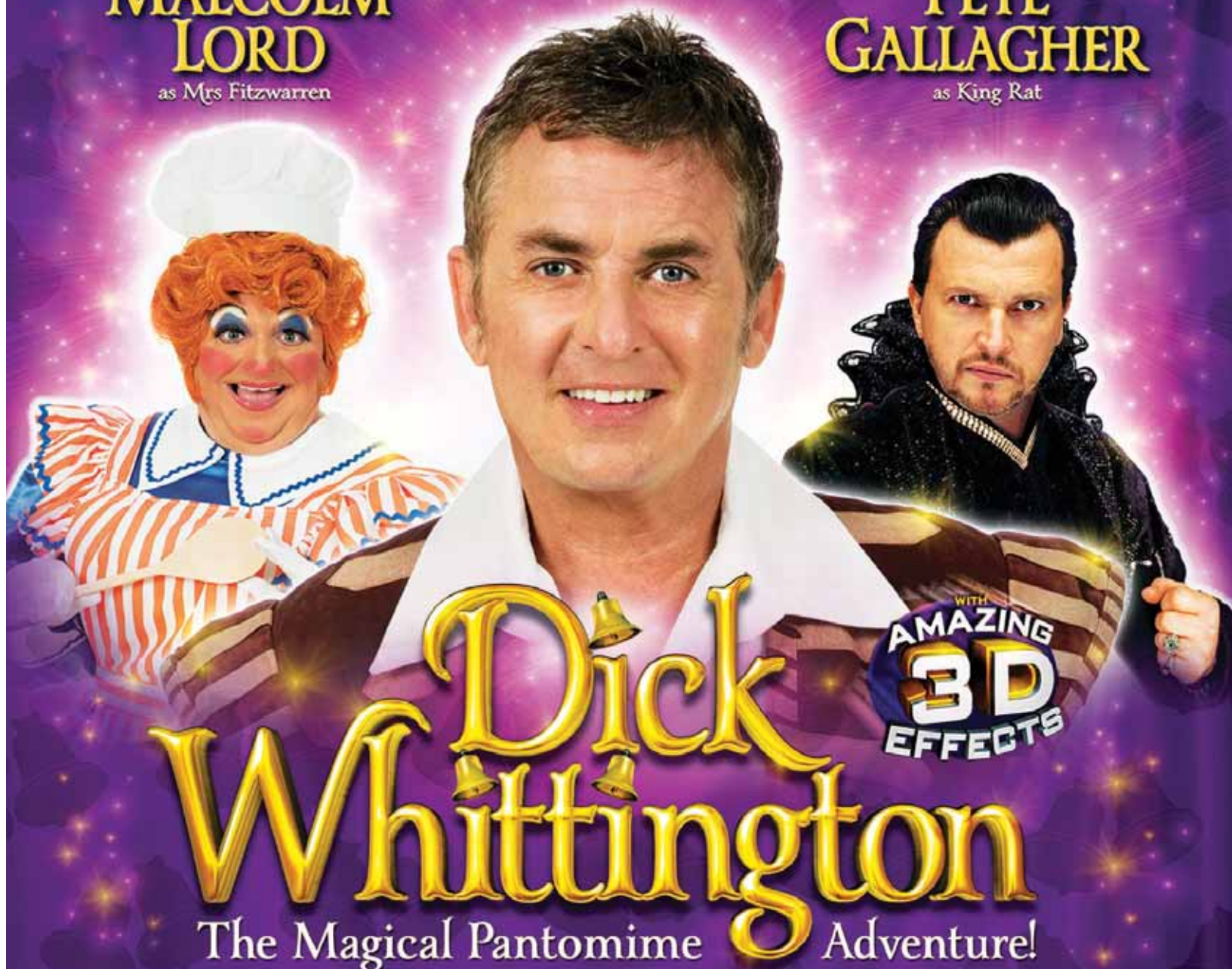
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## Rail commuters to face 1 per cent fare increase

By Chris Britcher

chris.britcher@archant.co.uk

SOUTHEASTERN passengers are set to face a rail fare price hike of just one per cent next year – the smallest annual increase for six years.

Kent commuters will see average fares rise slightly below the 1.1 per cent average rise announced on Friday by the Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operators and rail infrastructure firm Network Rail.

The government has imposed a one per cent rise in regulated fares – which include season tickets and peak time travel. The 1.1 per cent rise is the national average across all train operating companies.

The new prices come into effect on January 2.

Paul Plummer, chief executive of the Rail Delivery Group, said: "We know that nobody likes to pay more to travel by train, especially to get to work, and at 1.1 per cent this is the smallest average increase in fares for six years.

"On average 97p in every pound from fares is spent on trains, staff and other running costs. With passenger numbers doubling in the



**TRAVEL:** Prices are still going up...but nowhere near the scale of recent years

last 20 years, money from fares now almost covers the railway's day-to-day operating costs.

"This allows government to focus its funding on building a bigger, better network when the railway is becoming increasingly important at driving economic growth, underpinning jobs, and connecting friends and families."

A spokesman for Southeastern explained: "The overall average fare rise for next year for South-

eastern is in line with the government's rise of one per cent – slightly below the national average of 1.1 per cent.

"Fares contribute to the maintenance and future investment of services, as well as rail infrastructure. Over the next three years, Southeastern is investing millions of pounds refurbishing trains, and stations and providing better quality information to help people with their journeys."

David Sidebottom, passenger director at Transport Focus – the independent watchdog previously known as Passenger Focus, said: "Fares are still going up overall, on the back of years of above-inflation increases.

"Now that passengers are paying more than ever before, it is absolutely critical that industry delivers a more reliable day-to-day railway and starts to offer more flexible ticketing products."

## Further day of strike action expected on Medway's bus routes

BUS travellers in Medway look set for another day of major disruption tomorrow (Monday) as the second of two strike days take place.

More than 200 Arriva bus drivers walked out on Friday as part of a on-going dispute over timetable changes which union Unite say is "making it impossible to deliver a safe reliable service".

The strike will cause disruption to routes in Chatham, Gillingham, Rainham, Rochester, Hoo Peninsula and Strood and runs from 5am to 5pm.

Talks were continuing this weekend in a bid to resolve the impasse.

Unite regional officer Dave Weeks said: "Arriva has continually moved the goal posts over these timetable changes which make it impossible for drivers to deliver a reliable and safe service.

"Strike action is not a step our members take lightly. The blame for any disruption lays fairly and squarely at Arriva management's door. We have continually raised major concerns about the changes which are

leading to drivers being behind the wheel for excessive periods without even the time for a 'comfort' break.

"We would urge Arriva to get back around the negotiating table and seriously address the concerns of Medway Arriva bus drivers."

Heath Williams, managing director of Arriva Southern Counties, said: "Unfortunately time keeping issues were identified on some of the revised timetables and routes; the true impact of these did not come to light until schools returned in September.

"We have spent considerable time examining the data, and consulting with councillors, representatives and customers.

"It takes 56 days from registration of the revised service before we can introduce the improvements, which in this case will come into effect from January 24. In the interim, we have offered to work with representatives to ease the current drivers' duties in order to relieve some of the pressure."

## Debate seeks solution to the problem of lorry parking

DISCUSSIONS to tackle the problem of overnight lorry parking on our streets and industrial parks, were discussed at County Hall on Friday.

It formed part of a discussion which also included debate over Operation Stack and a trial system of enforcing tough parking regulations in Ashford aimed at easing the issue.

Speaking prior to the meeting,

Matthew Balfour, KCC's cabinet member for environment and transport, said: "The county has suffered for many years and the increasing numbers of lorries is only making the situation worse. We want to explore expanding the trial carried out in Ashford, but also mindful of the risk that any measures taken could result in a transfer of this problem to residential areas."

## Crooks steal £10,000 worth of charity children's clothes

THIEVES have taken an estimated £10,000 worth of baby and children's clothing and blankets from a charity in Ashford.

Based at Willesborough Industrial Park, Rockin' Baby donate baby slings and children's clothes to those in need across 30 countries globally.

The crime took place between 9pm on Wednesday and 6am on

Thursday morning.

Brian Jeaynes, 69, who manages the warehouse, said: "It was truly heartbreaking. December is meant to be a time of giving yet these people have stolen from a business that only aims to help others in need. It's disgusting."

Anyone who can help find the crooks should ring 101 and quote 030324.





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## Small venue wins big award from music's NME

RAMSGATE Music Hall has been voted Britain's best small venue for 2015 by the readers of NME.

Transformed from a derelict building into a music venue two years ago by owner Julian Bigg and his business partner, Robin Hyman, it has attracted top new and established talent including the likes of Neneh Cherry, the Jungle Brothers and Mercury Award

nominee C Duncan.

Mr Bigg said: "It's fantastic and a great honour to be thought of as the best in the country.

"We were nominated last year and came very close. This year we won it."

To celebrate the win, the NME booked The Mystery Jets to play a special show on Thursday night.



**RIP:** Peaches Geldof

## Bob Geldof: I half-expected Peaches' death

LIVE Aid hero Bob Geldof said this week he "half-expected" the death of his daughter Peaches.

The mother-of-two was just 25 when she was found dead at her home in Wrotham on April 7, 2014. She had died after taking a fatal heroin overdose.

Her father, now 67, who raised his family at their country retreat in Davington, near Faversham, said her spirit remains with him.

Speaking on Ireland's RTE Radio 1 about how he had lost his mother, ex-wife and now daughter from early deaths, he said: "With Peaches it was different; I was half-expecting it. The way she was carrying on, there's nothing you can do about it.

"But she's with me every second of every day. She's the girl that bounds into my consciousness when I least expect it."

A funeral service for Ms Geldof took place at the church in Davington - the same place where the service for her mother, the late TV presenter Paula Yates, had taken place. Ms Yates was just 41 when she was found dead in her London home after an accidental heroin overdose in 2000. She and Mr Geldof had divorced four years earlier.

He said: "With Paula, the leaving me was worse than the dying. It made me realise that love isn't enough."

## United approach in bid to crack down on child sexual exploitation cases

**By Tom Pyman**

tom.pyman@archant.co.uk

POLICE, councils and health services in Kent and Medway have joined forces to form a team ready to tackle the sexual exploitation of children.

Launched this week and based at police headquarters in Maidstone, it has been set up as a joint hub where agencies can work together to both identify children that are at risk, as well as people who are suspected of sexually exploiting children.

The team will be made up of officers and staff from Kent Police, Kent County Council, Medway Council and a range of health services.

Funding for the policing element of the team has been secured from police and crime commissioner Ann Barnes, which will help provide the Kent and Medway Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) team with roles such as intelligence officers and analysts to support the front-line policing, and from Kent and Medway councils.

A public awareness campaign was



**TEAM:** Will be based at police HQ

also launched to help members of the public understand the warning signs to look out for.

Detective Chief Inspector Hayley Spedding said: "For us it is really important that members of the public

contact us if they believe that a child is being sexually exploited, or is at risk.

"Part of the launch of our new team will be a campaign called Operation Willow to raise awareness of the signs to look out for, and to reassure people that if they contact us the information will be thoroughly investigated.

"Having all the appropriate services working under one roof is going to be hugely beneficial.

"From a police point of view we will be able to proactively investigate offences, but we will be able to share valuable intelligence with health and social services that will not only improve the police investigations that we are running, but also help other agencies provide specialist support for the specific needs of our victims or at risk children."

Barbara Peacock, director of children and adult services at Medway Council, said: "By working together we will be able to provide a strengthened multi-agency service, combining expertise from different areas to protect local young people."

## Trains to be replaced by buses in evenings

TRAIN passengers are being advised to check their timetables after Network Rail confirmed a major series of improvement works to take place between Tonbridge and Hastings, via Tunbridge Wells, later this month.

Network Rail handles all the rail infrastructure and will replace worn-out components and fix signalling systems.

It will mean changes to train services late in the evening on Mondays and Tuesdays from December 14. Trains that leave London and Hastings after 9pm on those days will be replaced by buses for the parts of their journeys between Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and Wadhurst.

Network Rail's route managing director for the south east, Alasdair Coates, said: "There is no good time to do this work and it is almost impossible to do so without impacting on passengers - however I'm confident that this will plan keep the railway open as long as possible, while also improving journeys for everybody."

## Education chief to be called on to resign

THERE have been fresh calls for Medway Council's children's services chief Mike O'Brien to resign after the authority was named second bottom in the entire country for its primary schools.

In a league table published by government inspectors Ofsted, just 64.2 per cent of pupils attended a primary rated 'good' or 'outstanding'. Only Doncaster fared worse.

Labour councillor Adam Price said: "I am disappointed to see Medway second from bottom of the league table. I put to Mike O'Brien at a meeting in October that if Key Stage 2 results in March are as bad as feared we will be calling for his resignation, and we will still be doing that in light of this report. "Our children need to be served much better."

Cllr O'Brien said: "This is an annual report that refers to historic figures and since March we have seen a significant improvement in Ofsted judgements of our schools, with eight now moving from requiring improvement to being good and three have gone from being good to outstanding."

## First Syrian refugee families start arriving

THE first three families being given refuge in and around the borough of Ashford are set to arrive within the next three weeks.

They will be housed in Newtown, Charing and Tenterden.

It forms part of the borough's plans to welcome 250 refugees, all from designated refugee camps in Syria, over the next five years.

All have been set up in housing with school places and healthcare provision organised. They will be in private accommodation and not council stock.

Gerry Clarkson, leader of Ashford Borough Council, said: "We will provide them with the basics and all the support needed to feel safe and settle into their new homes. We want to normalise their situation in the short-term.

"We hope that in the coming weeks and months these families can be adopted by their new communities. As we said from the outset, we want the families to be pleased to be here and we are certainly proud to welcome them."



# Prince Harry's rhino reunion in South Africa's national park

By Chris Murphy

editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

PRINCE Harry has released photographs of when he was reunited in a South African national park with a rhino he last saw at a Kent wildlife park.

With his brother Prince William, he fed Zawadi during a visit to the Port Lympne park near Hythe in 2012.

The black rhino was just three when she arrived at the park in March 2010 from Berlin Zoo before it released back into the wild at the Kruger National Park in South Africa as part of the Aspinall Foundation's on-going conservation work.

This week he authorised the release of several intimate photographs documenting his work as a conservation volunteer in Africa.

They portray moving scenes of Prince Harry working on the frontline of the fight against poaching during his three months there over the summer.

In notes he wrote to go with the images, he said: "I know how lucky I am to have these experiences, but hearing stories from people on the ground about how bad the situation really is, upset and frustrated me. How can it be that 30,000 elephants were slaughtered last year alone? None of them had names, so do we not care?"



**EXPLORE:** Prince Harry in Kruger Park

"And for what? Their tusks? Seeing huge carcasses of rhinos and elephants scattered across Africa, with their horns and tusks missing is a pointless waste of beauty."

They echoed comments he made back in Kent when he visited with his brother when he said: "I think they are extremely ignorant. I think they are selfish. I think they are wrong, totally and utterly wrong. It makes me very angry, it's a waste."

As the Duke of Cambridge hand fed Zawadi a pile of vegetables, he added: "If we don't

do something about them it is going to be a tragic loss for everyone.

"My message to them is simply 'stop'. It's a message about educating people and understanding that when you buy that rhino horn, or when you buy that ivory, you are taking this from an animal that has been slaughtered for this decorative ornament you have on your mantelpiece and you have at home - is that really what you desire and what you feel is right in the world?"

## Laser pen puts van driver in hospital

A VAN driver was left requiring hospital treatment after a laser pen was shone in his eyes.

The incident took place around 7pm on November 12 in Vaughan Drive, Kemsley, Sittingbourne, when the driver in his 30s was dazzled by the pen. He suffered injuries to his eye.

PC Steven Basset said: "Shining a laser pen into someone's eyes or at a moving vehicle is not only a criminal offence, but it is dangerous."

## Care home marks its 25th anniversary

CHARITY Avante Care and Support is celebrating 25 years of operating its services.

It provides residential care and support for older people living with dementia and a home care and support service for those in their own homes.

MD Mark Lloyd said: "We've very proud to have supported more than 50,000 over the years."

## Views on housing plan

MAIDSTONE Borough Council is calling for views on its housing strategy action plan.

Designed to outline building plans, raise the quality of existing houses and help ease homelessness in the borough, the consultation runs until December 31.

For details and to leave your views, visit the council's website.



## Sixth Form Information Evening Tuesday 8th December 2015



6.30pm until 8.00pm - Refreshments from 6.15pm

Director of Sixth Form talk at 6.30pm

Meadow Road, Gravesend, Kent, DA11 7LS Tel: 01474 533082 Email: offadmin@saintgeorgeschofe.kent.sch.uk





# Brutal killer Ash-Smith sees Tiltman appeal bid rejected

THE killer of Dartford schoolgirl Claire Tiltman has been refused the right to appeal his conviction.

Three judges at London's Court of Appeal dismissed the application by Colin Ash-Smith, meaning the 47-year-old will now likely spend the remainder of his life behind bars.

Trial judge Mr Justice Sweeney told the killer at Inner London Crown Court when sentencing him: "I have no doubt that this was a premeditated murder that you carried out because of the feeling of power that it gave you."

Claire was stabbed multiple times in an alleyway close to her home in Greenhithe in 1993, just four days after her 16th birthday. She had gone to visit a friend.

The Dartford Grammar School pupil had just finished her mock



GCSE exams.

Ash-Smith, a former milkman, was quizzed at the time of the original investigation, but could not be charged due to insufficient evidence, despite being a long term

suspect and serving time in prison for two separate attacks on women.

Ash-Smith was sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 21 years in November 2014 following a six week trial.

## Ann Barnes: I still fear cuts to Kent Police funds

POLICE and crime commissioner Ann Barnes is holding a public meeting to discuss the impact of chancellor George Osborne's autumn statement and its impact on police spending.

Despite the chancellor promising to 'protect our police' and maintain spending levels, Mrs Barnes is warning she expects there will still be cuts facing the county's force.

She said: "The chancellor promised to protect the amount spent on national policing overall but we've been looking at what this really means for us in Kent. It is not straightforward because the devil is in the detail. If he's keeping more money for national policing initiatives, then that money has to come from somewhere.

"We don't yet know what the

funding for Kent Police in 2016/17 will be – we'll have to wait until just before Christmas for that – but we do know that it will be less than this year and we will still have to make some savings as a result.

"Even in the unlikely event that Kent Police receives the same amount of cash for the next four years, even that doesn't take into account pay and price inflation at around two per cent a year.

"And then there is the threat to our own security, highlight by recent events in Paris."

The Policing and Austerity Conference will take place at the Kent Police College in Maidstone from 9am to noon on December 9. To book a seat, call 01622 604343 or email [contactyourpcc@pcc.kent.pnn.police.uk](mailto:contactyourpcc@pcc.kent.pnn.police.uk).

## Curry awards winner

WESTERHAM restaurant Shampun at the Spinning Wheel has won a top award.

It was named the best restaurant in the south east at the coveted British Curry Awards 2015.

The winners were revealed at a glitzy bash in London.

## Stolen property on show

A SPECIAL two-day event at Cliftonville Community Centre in Margate will aim to reunite victims of crime with their stolen property.

Around 2,000 items of property, thought stolen from across east Kent, will be on show on December 15 and 19 between 10am and 4pm.

## Thanet CCG public meet

GOVERNING body of the NHS Thanet Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) will meet on Tuesday at a public meeting.

Taking place at Thanet District Council's offices in Margate from 1.30-4pm, the agenda and details on how to attend can be found at [www.thanetccg.nhs.uk](http://www.thanetccg.nhs.uk).

## Drink drive crackdown

KENT Police has launched its winter drink drive campaign - it's annual bid to crack down on motorists risking the lives of both themselves and others.

The campaign will be widely publicised on social media, pubs, clubs, beer mats and posters across the county.



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## Top Three Stories



### 1. £7.5m visitor centre

Work has begun on a centre in Deal

### 2. Couple in animal ban

They left cat's face infections untreated

### 3. SECamb braces itself

Calls to hit 1,000,000 over festive period

## The Essential Guide:



### ...to the Dartford Crossing

Everything you need to know about the Dart Charge, which is now one year old.



**FEATURED PHOTO GALLERY:** The Port of London Authority's £7m maintenance vessel was officially launched and named London Titan on Thursday.

## Missed last week's...?

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## Top Three Blogs



### 1. Men on ground needed

Are government's Twitter troops enough?

### 2. Kent needs a 'lorry lane'

Why HGVs make commuters' lives miserable

### 3. Don't let terrorists win

Why we must be careful in response to Paris

## Results of the KoS Online Poll

### Has the Dart Charge improved your journey?

- 1 Yes - 23%
- 2 I forget to pay the charge - 5%
- 3 No, there's still congestion - 72%
- 4 Undecided - 0%

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# Air attacks on Syria backed by MPs but doubts continue to nag

Like much of the population, the complexities of tackling death cult IS left many of our politicians having to think long and hard over the way they voted. We review how many made their choice...

By Chris Murphy  
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

**A**DAM Holloway is no fool when it comes to the Syrian crisis. A former British Army officer and war correspondent for ITV, he has followed the unfolding events in the Middle East closely.

In fact, just last week, he was in both Iraq and Turkey, speaking to those closest to the situation.

And he was convinced that embarking on a fresh bombing campaign was not going to solve the problem of the death cult, which calls itself Islamic State (IS).

Yet this week, after a ten-hour debate on whether RAF planes should bomb targets in Syria he abstained.

It was perhaps the only real surprise among the county's politicians.

All the other county MPs – with the sole exception of Gordon Henderson for Sittingbourne and Sheppey who had made his voting intentions to oppose it very clear – voted with the prime minister.

Since then, Mr Holloway has kept silent – failing to return repeated calls to KoS and other media outlets.

But more should, no doubt, be read into his desire not to support the campaign or oppose it.

His only public comment on the day itself was a message via social network Twitter, which pointed to an article he had penned for the Daily Telegraph earlier in the week.

In it, he spoke eloquently of how the bomb would not heal the “broken politics” which underpins this fresh Middle East crisis.

He added: “I simply do not know enough about the big plan to fix the broken politics. That after the last ‘bomb Syria’ vote in 2013, I do not have confidence that there is any such plan at all.

“We are now being asked to extend the activity of manned British aircraft into Syria: a tiny tactical level contribution – unless you are on the receiving end of a bomb – which we are asked to believe will transform the strategic situation. This is not a meaningful defence of the British people, nor the people of Beirut, or Paris, or Mosul, or Raqqa.

“If we really want to help, we should be using the influence we think we don’t have. We should be using it to communicate the message in every possible corridor that the US, Russia, Turkey, Iran and Saudi need to decide that they are serious about a cure – and that if they continue to apply palliative care in their own interests it will result in the sickness getting a lot worse.”



**READY:** Tornados get ready for action while protesters campaign against strikes in London



Despite the surprise at his failure to come down on the ‘no’ side to action, he is probably caught in the same dilemma as many others – torn between the knowledge something must be done, but questioning the impact of more air strikes.

Dr Matthew Jones, from Herne Bay, is lecturer in political science at the University of Greenwich.

He explained: “There is concern that bombs alone are not enough. In order to defeat IS, not only will there need to be ‘boots on the grounds’, but concerted attempts to negate their revenue generating activities.

“However, as we have seen in Afghanistan and Iraq, the involvement of troops is not only a political liability, it also drastically raises the chances of UK troops being killed in action.

“And should IS be degraded to the point where they are no longer a threat, who will emerge to fill the power vacuum? The situation in Syria is very complex, and as we have seen in Libya the post-conflict landscape can also be very violent.”

Sir Roger Gale, Tory MP for Thanet North backed the motion, but agreed it was not going to solve the crisis.

He told KoS: “Just engaging in air

strikes may in the short-term decapitate the enemy high command but that enemy has revealed a capacity to reorganise and regroup very swiftly and it will only be defeated, in the long term, by boots on the ground followed by – and this is what was so appallingly lacking in Iraq in Tony Blair’s war of 2003 – a very clear reconstruction and democratic strategy not just in Syria but throughout the Middle East.”

And that is perhaps the biggest political challenge facing the world today in a region in which peace seems so often so fragile and different factions are constantly at odds with one another.

Kelly Tolhurst, Conservative MP for Rochester and Strood, shared many politicians’ view of the difficulty of voting on this week’s motion.

She said: “This was probably the biggest, and hardest, decision I will ever have to make as an MP. So many constituents got in touch with me on both sides of the argument, I have read and listened to the varied viewpoints, and emotions that have been expressed.

“My decision was based on the fact that we will be no safer from attack by Daesh if we were to take no action, I felt that we have no choice but to confront our barbaric enemy now given they have tried to attack us no less than seven times, and will try to do so again.”

For Tory MP Gordon Henderson, however, air attacks were not sufficient – and on those grounds he voted against the motion.

He explained: “Including emails, phone calls, face to face conversations and Facebook posts, I have received representations from 332 of my constituents of whom 268, or 81 per cent, urged me to vote against bombing in Syria, although a significant number added the caveat that they support air strikes when used to support ground forces, which is my own position.

“My decision to vote against bombing in Syria was not influenced only by those representations, however, it is good to know a majority of those who contacted me agree with my decision.”

Just hours after the vote was an-

nounced – 397 MPs voting in favour, 223 against – the first RAF jets took off from the allies’ base in Cyprus.

The political fall-out, however, will take far longer to settle.

Adds Dr Matthew Jones: “The domestic political element of this issue is very interesting, particular as it relates to the Labour party.

“Corbyn should be credited for allowing Labour MPs to vote freely on this issue. However, the fact that 66 members voted in favour of UK air strikes does reflect how divided the party is.

“It is interesting to note how many members of both the shadow cabinet and leadership contenders voted in favour of the air strikes. Hilary Benn gave a particularly impassioned speech in favour of UK airstrikes, which has been well received.”

**■ What do you think? Are more air strikes the right way forward? Share your views and join the debate. Email us at editorial@kosmedia.co.uk or write to The Editor, KoS, Kent House, 81 Station Road, Ashford TN23 1PP.**

## PM: AIR STRIKES WILL HELP BRING ‘POLITICAL SETTLEMENT’

PRIME minister David Cameron has insisted British war planes will help to bring about a political settlement in Syria as opposition forces in the country claimed UK action “will not make a big difference”.

More fighter jets were sent to RAF Akrotiri on Cyprus ahead of further sorties in Syria and continued raids in Iraq against IS.

But the Free Syrian Army claimed British intervention is “just a few more jets” over the course of a long campaign.

Bashar Assad’s regime, meanwhile, denounced the mission as “noise and propaganda”, claiming that any country that does not



co-ordinate its attacks with the government “won’t win the fight against terrorism”.

During a visit to Bulgaria, Mr Cameron said: “We’ve now got more Tornados and more Typhoons in Cyprus ready to take action both over the skies of Iraq and over the skies of Syria because we have to defeat Daesh

wherever it is. Bringing everyone around the table and trying to get a political settlement is absolutely crucial but we can’t wait for that to happen before we start taking action against Daesh as we have after the vote and as we will continue to do.”

He added: “The strikes actually help to bring about a political settlement because the strikes take the action to Daesh, which is everyone’s enemy and we do need to have a moderate opposition in Syria that can be part of the future government.

“So the political process and the action against Daesh to keep us safe at home go hand in hand.”



**IN:** Alan Johnson says there is a misjudged view of what life outside of the EU will be like

PICTURES: PA



# Johnson hits out over Farage's 'sepia tinted' view on an EU exit

While MPs mulled over military action in Syria this week, one veteran MP launched the Labour party's campaign to stay in the European Union. Archant's political editor **Annabelle Dickson** met Alan Johnson, who warned of border controls at Dover if we opted out and hit out at Nigel Farage...

**A**LAN Johnson did not wear a suit when we met and was the only politician in sight when he launched the Labour party's campaign to stay in the European Union on Tuesday.

For him, the case to stay in the European Union is not the one made by the likes of Stuart Rose, the former Marks and Spencer boss leading the Stronger in Europe campaign, but the one for the ordinary worker.

Fearful of the mistakes of the Scottish referendum "No" to independence campaign, where Labour teamed up with the Tories in a move credited with

their near annihilation in Scotland's Westminster seats in May, the 65-year-old former home secretary has been drafted in to lead the Labour party's own case to stay in.

The seasoned politician – a former postman – will no doubt see a great deal of the former South Thanet candidate and Ukip leader Nigel Farage, who lives in Westerham, when the campaign really gets going.

A date has not been set for the referendum. Prime minister David Cameron is still busy with his renegotiation. But he dismissed suggestions that campaigners to stay in are on the back foot, with Ukip stealing a march with its country-wide debates from village halls to theatres.

Mr Johnson is dismissive of what he describes as "a kind of evening with Nigel Farage" suggesting that the people turning up were Ukip supporters, and probably some of those are people that would never change their minds.

"I am not like Nigel Farage in the sense that I am not fanatical about Europe. It has not driven my whole political life. I think, I reckon like most British people, I think it is a good thing and we should be in it.

"Nobody loves a market, but people recognise that their voice in an increasingly interdependent world has to be through the United Nations, Nato, International Monetary Fund and the EU is the most important international organisation."

And on the thorny issue of free-

dom of movement, he is dismissive of claims that with an out vote Britain would reclaim its borders.

With Britain already out of the Schengen agreement – the 1985 treaty which saw many countries in mainland Europe become borderless and the Dublin Regulation, which determines the EU member state responsible to examine an application for asylum seekers, Britain is already in the best possible position, he claims.

Britain's "vulnerable point" between Calais and Dover had seen the border effectively move to France.

"If you go to Calais it is virtually British," he said. "The mayor comes to parliament and moans about that, they say 'take your borders back'."

With an out vote he claims: "We will be taking our border back, because if we are outside the EU, France will be saying it is inconceivable there would be the goodwill there if we wrenched ourselves away from Europe after 40 years of membership to have agreements like that.

"We will be more vulnerable to inward migration and there are issues around free movement we want to change. If we are not in there dealing with it then you have to accept the results."

He is also critical of what he describes as Nigel Farage's "nostalgic sepia tinted world we are going to go back to".

"That is all gone. Britain coming out of the EU isn't going to see Britain going back to the 1950s – thank goodness by the way.

"Britain is somehow portrayed as

being a seven-stone weakling on the beach with these bullies kicking sand in our face all the time, as if Britain hasn't got influence in Europe, as if we are not an important country on that stage.

"If you want to talk about state aid rules, we virtually drew them up, so that we did not lose out to countries supporting our industry at the cost of industry," he adds.

So if the party is not going to emulate the Ukip campaign so far, what is it going to do?

Every constituency will have a champion.

"They will be feeding up stories of what matters to people in areas and using that to get conversations going in the pub, the hairdresser, the local supermarket about why it is best to stay in Europe."

He claims they will be tasked with "exploding the myths", admitting Labour's silence on Europe had been able to gain a lot of ground.

But what about largely Conservative-held places like Kent?

"Even though we might not have any seats. We have members in every constituency," Mr Johnson said.

And this could be their moment.

"Because it is not the odd thing that first past the post can throw up, every vote counts. I think we can get people out to vote and use Labour party activists where we haven't given them attention before because they are in unwinnable seats.

"They are just as keen to be involved and they can get on the front foot with this."

He is adamant that there is a real danger that Britain could leave the European Union.

"The danger and the risk of leaving are huge for this country. That is why I think it is the most profound political decision we are going to make.

"It is much more profound than in 1975 when it was nine member states we had joined and the world wasn't as interdependent as it is now. It is far more important than even general elections whether we stay in Europe or we leave," he adds.

## WHEN IS D-DAY?

THE date has not been set and the renegotiation is not yet complete, but a number of campaign groups have already started work winning heart and minds on both sides of the European Union debate.

Among them, Britain Stronger in Europe is headed by former Marks and Spencer boss Stuart Rose and British Influence, a cross-party pressure group formed in 2012, are campaigning to remain in the EU.

Vote Leave, the main out campaign was launched in October and is headed by Matthew Elliot, the founder of campaign group the Taxpayers' Alliance and is backed by Ukip's only MP Douglas Carswell. Leave, EU claims to be the grassroots anti-EU campaign favoured by Ukip leader Nigel Farage.





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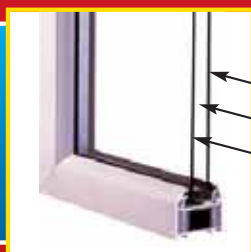


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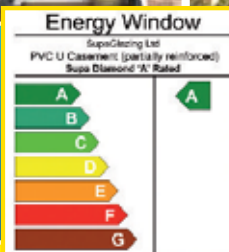
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# Drug deaths in sharp increase as teams unite to tackle issue

The number of people dying through misuse of drugs has risen by 30 per cent in recent years with heroin the big killer. Now it seems, the best way to fight it is for support organisations to team up to stop the figures rising any higher...

**By Chris Murphy**

[editorial@kosmedia.co.uk](mailto:editorial@kosmedia.co.uk)

**T**HE number of deaths caused by drug-use across the county has risen by more than 30 per cent over recent years, statistics reveal.

And it has prompted a multi-agency approach at identifying just why the number of deaths in Kent is on the rise.

The statistics from the Office for National Statistics reveal the number of deaths where drugs were a factor was 138 between 2006-08. But that has jumped to 180 from 2012-14.

And the drug that is causing the most damages remains heroin and similar drugs used as a substitute.

It is also feared a rise in the use of so-called 'legal highs' – chemical concoctions which side-step regulations until the law catches up with them and then are altered again – could be a contributing factor in introducing people to harder drugs.

Jess Mookherjee is public health consultant at Kent County Council. She explained: "Drug misuse causes a wide range of problems for families and communities as well as for the person with the drug problem and the number of drugs-related deaths is a major concern to the whole of Kent."

"We are investigating the increase in drug-related deaths in some parts of Kent as part of a multi-agency team, including NHS England which commissions services in prisons."

"We are committed to introducing measures that contribute to the reduction of drug-related deaths across the county, and the public health team is responsible for leading a multi-agency 'serious incident panel' to investigate the root causes and learn and share lessons. The panel brings together public health, police, and drug treatment providers such as Turning Point, CRI and Addaction."

"They meet to review learning from drug-related deaths and agree actions that could be taken to contribute to a reduction in the number of people who die as a result of taking drugs."

"To help, we make sure effective and accessible preventative information, treatment, support and recovery services are available."

Medway has the most alarming statistics, with more than double the number of drug deaths than other districts in the county.

Between 2012-14, some 41 people died. Second in the list is Swale, with 20 deaths, fol-



lowed jointly by Thanet and Canterbury, both on 19.

However, Medway – which comes under one unitary authority outside of KCC – has a larger population than other authorities in the county.

A spokesman for the council explained that it too was already tackling the issue in a manner similar to that adopted by KCC. They explained: "We're committed to introducing measures that contribute to the reduction of drug related deaths in the area, and the public health team have recently set up a multiagency panel to tackle the issue."

"The 'drug related death panel' brings together public health, Kent Police, Kent Probation, and charities Turning Point and Open Road. They meet regularly to review individual drug related deaths and agree actions that could be taken to contribute to a reduction in the number of people who die as a result of taking drugs."

Sophie Price is the operations manager at Turning Point's Medway active recovery service – a drug and alcohol recovery service based in Chatham and Gillingham.

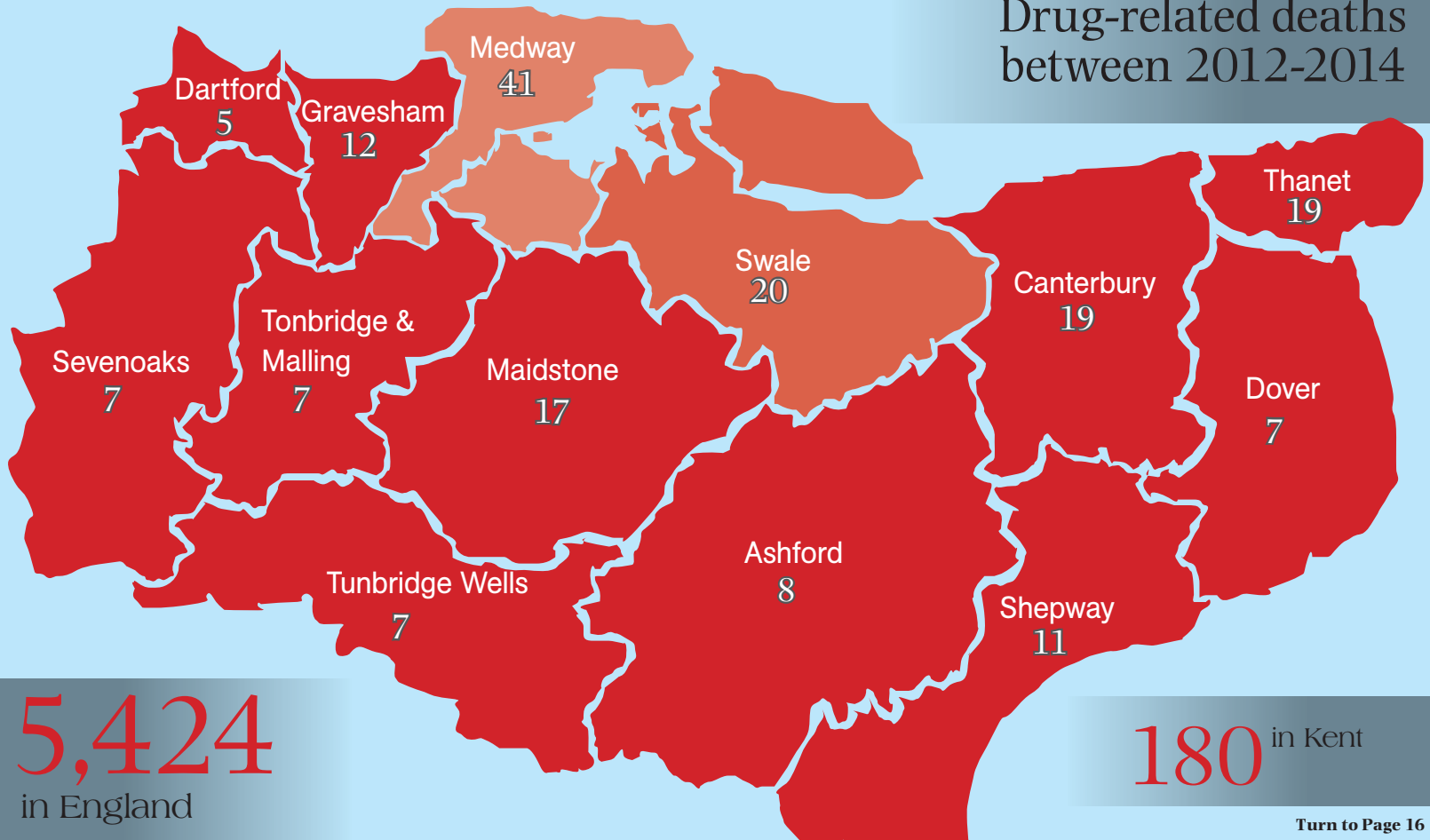
She explained: "Due to the increase in drug-related deaths, the panel provides a joined-up approach to the problems posed by drug misuse."

"In addition to this we provide thorough assessments that identify complex needs; access to detoxification and rehabilitation services; support with education, training and employment, as well as an innovative recovery academy."

Andy Power does a similar job in the east of the county. He told KoS: "It is disappointing to



# Drug-related deaths between 2012-2014



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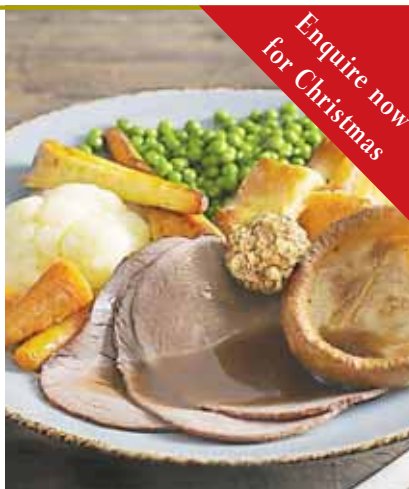
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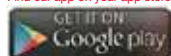


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see a rise in the number of drug-related deaths, but we remain committed to tackling the root causes of the problem and minimising the risk of death.

"We maintain a holistic approach to supporting people affected by substance misuse and aim to guide people through recovery to live drug and drug free lives.

"At Turning Point we offer community and residential treatment as well as naloxone, a drug used to treat overdose in an emergency situation. We have trained family members and carers of people affected by drug misuse to safely administer naloxone which has gone a long way to preventing many more drug-related deaths. We also work with partners across the county to ensure people know about the support on offer if they're worried about their or someone else's substance misuse."

Kent Police admits it is facing an uphill challenge getting on top of the drugs problem across the county.

A spokesman said: "Kent Police takes the view that one drug related death is one too many and we are continually looking at ways to get these substances off of our streets.

"This is done by a number of ways throughout the county, including the execution of warrants and enforcement checks. We engage with various partner agencies that provide a wealth of support for a wide range of people, including those suffering with addiction and those from vulnerable backgrounds.

"Officers work tirelessly to catch and deter drug dealers from operating in all parts of Kent and we remain determined to bring as many offenders as possible to justice."



## BEATING ADDICTION...

WHILE many do pay the ultimate price for their drug use, there are also harrowing – yet heartening – stories of some who find the strength to face their demons full on and were eventually, with help, able to break the chains that kept them a slave to the needle.

One woman who did just that is Sonia Hayford.

She told us: "My drug problem started when I was 22 years old, and when my addiction was at its worst I was injecting heroin and crack up to 10 times a day.

"I was committing around £4,000 worth of crimes every week; I'd been to prison and I didn't have a proper relationship with my family who no longer trusted me.

"But that was a long time ago now, having since decided to turn

my life around. The decision to change came together in one moment. One thing I remember very clearly is the judge telling me that he believed in me, but I also remember feeling sick of the life I was living and wanted to change.

"I went to Turning Point for help, and they provided me with enough support to overcome my drug problem and start a new life. Since then I have started working as a peer mentor at Turning Point. This means I can speak to people who are just coming into drug/alcohol treatment. I remind them that I used to feel my life and my addiction were hopeless, but it isn't hopeless; what helps me stay focused and confident is being part of my community and giving something back."

## HEROIN... CLAIMING MORE LIVES

HEROIN, the opium-based drug, has never been cheaper and more available and that is driving the national death rate.

The Office for National Statistics found there was 3,346 drug poisoning deaths in England and Wales in 2014, the highest since records began in 1993.

Deaths involving heroin and/or morphine soared by 64 per cent from 579 in 2012 to 952 in 2014, with the increased availability, price, purity and the age of those using it said to influence the figures.

Those in their 40s have the highest mortality rate from drug use, followed by those in their 30s.

Rosanna O'Connor is the director of alcohol, drugs and tobacco at Public Health England. She said: "The increased global

availability and purity of heroin is clearly having an impact here.

"Fewer people are using heroin but the harms are increasingly concentrated among older, more vulnerable users and those not recently in touch with their local drug treatment services. Reassuringly, overall drug use has also declined and treatment services have helped many people to recover but these figures show the need for an enhanced effort.

"We need to ensure the most vulnerable users can access drug treatment services, where we know they have the best chance of recovery.

"We will continue to support local authorities in delivering effective recovery services for all those that need them."



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Sunday 13th December	<b>GREEN MAN OPEN MIC @ 7.30pm</b> Fronted by the local talent - Nigel Lewis Last open mic before Christmas - go on give it a go
Tuesday 15th December	<b>The Andy White Duo @ 8.30pm</b> Vocals, guitar and bongos - ideal for a party The play list of covers is amazing
Thursday 17th December	<b>Steve Lauri from The Hollies @ 8.30pm</b> Vocals & guitar and some great Hollies hits Bring your dancing shoes
Sunday 20th December	<b>Nigel &amp; Katie @ 8.30pm</b> Katie is the vocalist and Nigel on keys Come and be wowed!
Tuesday 22nd December	<b>Innocent Bystanders @ 8.30pm</b> Vocals, guitar, keyboards and sax Covering hits from the 70s/80s and more
Thursday 24th December	<b>Christmas Eve Nick Woods @ 8.00pm</b> Nicks vocals and guitar are the best From old to new covers - something for everyone

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The Green Man also packs a punch with its event nights that see a fun Quiz Night on Monday night, Tuesday's Steak and Rib Night, Fish Night on Wednesdays and Pies and Puddings Night (two courses for £12) on a Thursday.

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**REVISED:** Shepway council is contributing a top-up sum to help further tackle empty buildings in the borough. Empty Homes chief executive Helen Williams, inset.

# Is housing project No Use Empty coming to a high street near you?

It has already proved itself in east Kent by tackling the housing crisis by cutting the number of empty properties and now the pioneering scheme may be about to tackle our struggling high streets too...

**By Chris Britcher**

chris.britcher@archant.co.uk

**A** PIONEERING project which has transformed thousands of empty homes across the county and brought them back into use could be about to become the architect of a revolution in our high streets.

The No Use Empty initiative has attracted praise from around the UK for the role it has played in helping ease the housing crisis by funding renovation work on abandoned properties.

And this week, as it celebrated its tenth anniversary, it was revealed its next mission could be to turn high streets with empty stores into a blend of stores and homes.

That would mean empty shops being turned into housing in a bid to breathe new life into town centres, create a fresh sense of community and boost trade too.

No Use Empty is an initiative run by Kent County Council and which works closely with all 12 district councils.

Since it was set up in 2005 – initially as a pilot project to tackle problems in some of east Kent's coastal towns – it has reduced the number of empty properties by 40 per cent (dropping from 9,000 to just over 5,800) and helped provide more than 600 units of accommodation – from apartments to family homes.

Mark Dance, Kent County Council's Conservative cabinet member for economic development, told KoS this

week he now wants it to go to the next level.

He explained: "What I'm trying to do is get more out of No Use Empty (NUE). It's done well but what's next?"

"I've always had a desire to see changes to high streets where take-up is low. If, let's take Margate high street as an example, you had every third empty shop converted into residential what you end up with is groups and pairings of premises and residential then you start getting tended hanging baskets, for example. So the shops are needed and there's a community building up."

"I think we can introduce an element of residential so the path to rejuvenating that high street is not so long."

"Working with the district councils, let's write to some of the owners that clearly aren't using the shops and let get some ideas going."

"It's the next step and I'll certainly put that to the team and take a look at it and get them to take it out and research it."

The concept of injecting residential elements to the high street is not new.

Last year Tony Stockill, managing director at retail consultants the Javelin Group, said the government needed to "repurpose" many of our high streets, adding "some will have to return to residential use and we'll be left with fewer, bigger, better retail high streets. It's all about managing the decline".

Few would argue something needs to be done. Fewer would challenge that No Use Empty does not have the reputation to be the driving force behind it.

Its concept is alarmingly simple. By accessing government funds for housing and taking a modest slice from the KCC budget, NUE, at its heart, recycles loans. So, for example, if you are a landlord of a big house but find securing the finance necessary from the banks to get the cash needed to renovate and bring it back to life, NUE could be the solution.

Steve Grimshaw has been project manager for more than six years, after more than two decades within the county council.

He explains: "With the banks cutting back on their lending, sometimes we're dealing with small developers

who find the major institutions are not interested in lending on derelict properties and if they do they are only prepared to lend up to 60 per cent of the value of the property while we'll go to 90 per cent."

For many, the short-term loan will be at zero per cent interest and only handed over with guarantees that all other funding for the project has been secured. In addition, there are strict conditions in place that ensure the property cannot be sold or transferred until the loan is paid back and that there is a clearly agreed strategy.

So, for example, if there is a big three-storey building it may be that it

will be turned into three apartments. Or, conversely, if there are problems with multiple-occupancy buildings, then they are renovated and turning back into family homes.

Explains KCC's Mark Dance: "If we get involved we can dictate the way the accommodation is used. It gives us a little bit of influence of how the property can be designed. We can do that because we're helping the owner who wants to rent it out, so you can come up with a package."

And the impact of such development is wide ranging.

Explains Mr Grimshaw: "It's not just about bringing houses back to

## SHEPWAY'S £400,000 FUND TO BOOST FURTHER WORK

A MAJOR financial support package was this week unveiled by Shepway District Council - designed at providing a top-up fund for properties in the area being revived by the No Use Empty (NUE) initiative.

Unveiled at a special reception on Wednesday at the NUE headquarters at County Hall in Maidstone – home of Kent County Council – it coincided with the National Empty Homes Week, designed to activate more movement on those properties that have stood empty for more than six months.

Shepway council is pledging £400,000. Called Shepway No Use Empty Plus, KCC will continue to administer the funds.

Alan Ewart-James, Tory cabinet

member for housing at Shepway District Council, explained: "We have set aside £400,000 in this year's budget to top up loans offered by KCC which will give owners access to loans of up to £40,000 for every home they bring back into use. It's just part of our targeted programme of direct action to reduce the numbers of empty homes in Shepway."

Mark Dance, KCC's cabinet member for economic development, hopes the move will encourage other local authorities to follow suit.

He told KoS: "I would think others will come on board. They may want to do their own thing and may have their own ideas. But we can concentrate on a particular area and make a real impact with

these recycled loans."

Certainly the seaside towns in the east of the county – which NUE was originally set up to tackle in 2005 – continue to be the main benefactors to the scheme, with around 80 per cent of funding going to those areas.

Adds Cllr Dance: "Ramsgate has got more listed property than any other town in Kent but you wouldn't believe that. So how can we play a role in some of these places which are run down. That's where NUE can play such a big part."

"We will continue to focus on the coastal areas, complementing larger scale economic development within those areas and raising the aspirations for those who live and work within the coastal communities."

## CASE STUDY 1: PRINCE OF WALES HOUSE, DOVER

ONE of the largest projects undertaken by No Use Empty, Prince of Wales House was transformed after standing empty for more than 20 years.

The fine building in Durham Hill, which dates back to 1800, cost £650,000 in total to renovate funded to the tune of £175,000 in an interest-free loan by NUE.

It needed a new roof, windows, staircase, walls and all major services after lying empty since 1993. Formerly known as Prospect House, it used to serve as a refuge for shipwrecked crews under the ownership of the British Sailors' Society. It became the Prince of Wales Sea Training School in 1953 providing training for 5,000 youngsters aged between 15-17.

When the school shut in 1975, Dover College used it until 1994 when it was sold to the YMCA. It subsequently fell into disrepair and was then sold to a development company that then sought assistance to renovate it.

Today it boasts 18 one-bedroom apartments and two two-bed apartments.



**TRANSFORMED:** Today Prince of Wales House has 18 one-bed and two two-bed apartments

use, it's much more about the wider benefits the money being invested in the local economy, jobs are safeguarded, we're providing homes and it's having an impact on people's perception of seeing empty properties around."

Given the squeeze on housing and our apparent relentless appetite for properties, one of the county's recurring discussion points is just where all these new homes should go. Each development proposal tends to be met by a chorus of criticism about more of our countryside or green spaces being consumed.

But NUE offers a more palatable alternative. This is not about building new, this is about reviving the older buildings and making them come alive again. It's inspirational stuff which has attracted the attention nationwide.

Helen Williams is chief executive of Empty Homes, a national campaign-

ing charity which works to raise awareness of empty homes – promote research into how they can be brought back into use and then take those ideas to influence government and local authorities.

She explained to KoS: "I think the NUE scheme has been very successful and because it is a partnership between county and local authority level it works very well. I don't think it matters how it operates, but that there is a focus on that and a case-work approach.

"A number of local authorities around the country have grant or loan schemes available and, in addition, a number of authorities or housing charities attract a government grant from the affordable homes programme where they can buy or lease empty properties, do them up and let them out to those on the waiting list. That's where they would take over the management directly.

"If you look at government data on empty homes – recorded empty homes have come down from a peak in 2008. There's a couple of reasons for that. One is the likes of NUE as a dedicated funding programme, the other is that post the financial crash the property market has picked up making it easier for some to sell their properties and do them up.

"What we promote is to seek to know the individual property owners and what the barriers and financial burdens are so they can seek to address them."

That relationship building is seen as

vital in the whole process. Getting to know the property owner, understand their situation and seek a solution – through advice or a loan – is not only part of due diligence process, but ensures all parties buy into the concept.

"Primarily the district councils are the source of the info," explains NUE's Steve Grimshaw. "They have the database which identifies where the properties are so they will routinely write and encourage the owner to come forward and bring it into use.

"We have had lots of success in terms of advice and guidance. In percentage terms – advice and encour-

agement accounts for around 60 per cent of those properties we have worked on being brought back into use – whereas loans take up about 20 per cent.

"The councils will hold those preliminary conversations and if they feel it needs financial help from the county council they will engage in that conversation."

Yet when it comes to the involvement of public money, is there not a fear that those property owners who seek funding end up simply profiting themselves or defaulting on payments?

"To date we've administered £14million worth of loans," explains



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## CASE STUDY 2: MARINE PARADE, FOLKESTONE



**INITIAL LOAN:** Funds will help free up more than a dozen accommodation units

Mr Grimshaw, "and only had one loan written off for £50,000. Which is truly amazing. And that was a loan on which we had no opportunity to get our money back.

"But with loans they are time limited and there are circumstances where individuals don't have all the money to repay the loans on the date they are due. So over the last few years we've renegotiated on 12-15 individual projects and if we do that the interest free period becomes null and avoid and we impose an interest rate.

"Through that we've recovered that £50,000 and have a surplus of about £60,000.

"So if we have another bad debt we have a way of protecting our capital fund."

NUE offers secure loans from its recyclable loan fund of up to £175,000 – a maximum of £25,000 per unit – to people wishing to revive long-term empty properties. Originally beginning with small residential conversions, the scheme has expanded into converting long-term empty commercial and industrial sites into housing, as well as also working on affordable housing projects.

It is estimated that by giving zero per cent loans, the loss of interest over the three-year term is around £2,500-3,000. But that is seen as something of an investment for the wider benefits.

Adds the NUE project manager: "By providing the funds to bring

property back into use the money is spent on the local economy and when those buildings are back in use the district benefits from the council tax that comes in."

But the big financial benefit is by tapping into the government's New Homes Bonus scheme that has run for the past five years.

Designed to encourage local authorities to hit housing targets by providing financial incentives, it also applies to the rejuvenation of previously empty homes.

Kent has benefited more than most other local authorities through this - cashing in to the tune of around £88.8m. Around 10 per cent of that was through empty homes coming

A FORMER centre of Army intelligence during the First World War, numbers 8 and 9 Marine Parade are a pair of late Victorian semi-detached six-storey houses on the sea front.

NUE has provided a £149,999 loan initially for number 8 and when that is completed and repaid, it will be reissued for number 9 to be renovated too. The result will be more than a dozen units of accommodation.

The site owner said: "This will be a complete refurbishment of two dilapidated buildings. Having seen them stand empty for so long it seemed appropriate to bring them back into use and make them serviceable again."

back on line. Thus the NUE scheme is providing a direct route to £8.8m. "And that's not a bad return," says Mr Grimshaw.

In short, it underlines how a modest, targeted, strategy can deliver significant returns while benefiting local communities. Funding for NUE is currently protected for the next three years, but it is clear that it needs to keep delivering a clear return and benefit to survive.

"Everyone is of the ethos that we want to uplift the area we live and work in," says Mr Grimshaw, "and what we have introduced over the last couple of months is an interest-bearing loan but again that's a way of generating a little bit of income in order to cover costs in this time of budget cuts."

KCC cabinet member Mark Dance is clearly convinced its impact is not only significant but capable of playing a key role at the heart of major changes going in the county.

He explained: "NUE are focused and without a shadow of a doubt its impact on rejuvenation of our coastal

areas should not be underestimated. But we can use them in a broader sense too.

"We've just been discussing at cabinet the issues surrounding the Ebbsfleet garden city and the London Paramount Resort. We're going to have this brand new, modern developments created and I think we should go into Swanscombe, which sits next to where these developments will be, and seek to bring that up in appearance too."

After 10 years there will be a caution not to over stretch the NUE model; especially given the success it has enjoyed so far.

While Helen Williams at Empty Homes admits to being "an optimist", the future, she believes has been enhanced by NUE and its like.

She concludes: "There are a lot of the people working to bring empty homes back into use who are driven by the sense of doing this; fired up by how it helps regenerate areas and improve neighbourhoods. I'm confident they will be coming up with creative ways to bring houses back into use."

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# Rural Plc continues to sow seeds of growth

**Pat Crawford**, who for many years has worked for Hadlow College and been heavily involved in promoting the county's rural economy, takes a look at Kent's Rural Plc organisation and explains why it has become so significant.

**K**ENT'S Rural Plc began very simply. Four years' ago a group of individuals who were all, in different ways, involved in the rural sector were sitting chatting.

They recognised that the sector's true value – in economic and social terms – afforded opportunities for inward investment.

They realised these opportunities were being lost and they wanted to put the sector on the map in business terms; setting out objectives that would help to fulfil their vision – they created Rural Plc to lead the initiative.

That was four years ago, during which time work and other commitments have resulted in some changes to the people behind the plan.

Two original members – chairman Mike Bax and finance director Mark Lumsdon-Taylor – have been joined

by George Jessel as resources and political director and Charles Tassell as farming and environmental director.

Mr Jessel is a past chairman of the Kent County Agricultural Society, organiser of the Kent Show. Mr Lumsdon-Taylor has been a key figure in the relentless rise at Hadlow College. Mr Bax has been senior partner in his own rural property practice, the BTF Partnership since 1988. While Mr Tassell is a former NFU chairman.

The work undertaken by these individuals is entirely voluntary which makes the progress achieved all the more remarkable.

From the beginning Rural Plc was good at recognising gaps and fissures that interfere with progress and they set about remedying the deficiencies.

One simple but much needed initiative has been the setting up of a calendar of rural events. This enables organisers of rural events – national,

regional and local – to check what is already scheduled and thus avoid duplications and overlaps that might undermine success.

Delivered via Rural Plc's online presence, the website also enables the public to view the diverse programme of events offered within the rural sector.

In the past, locating career and job opportunities in the rural sector has not always been easy but this is being reversed.

In partnership with Kent County Council, the Kent Rural Careers app and website have been set up to provide information about a vast range of career structures offered by the rural industries.

The site also lists job vacancies and anybody, in any rural sector industry, can advertise a vacancy free of charge. More and more employers and job seekers are picking up on this service and the intention is to make it



the 'go-to site' for the sector.

Attracting inward investment features high on the Rural Plc agenda.

Finance director Mark Lumsdon-Taylor explained: "We are helping individual businesses to leverage public and private sector money in order to grow their enterprise."

"We have some very enterprising people in Kent and we are assisting start-ups by providing information, giving advice and know-how and helping them to negotiate finance."

At the recent AGM, held at the end of November, George Jessel revealed he and Mr Lumsdon-Taylor are working with Romney Tweed to develop a

tweed-making business on the Marsh.

The idea for this business initiative goes back to 2011 when Pat and Robert Alston read a socio-economic report indicating that the Romney Marsh, already an area of social deprivation with 26 per cent unemployment in the 18-24 age bracket, was forecast to be badly affected by the decommissioning of the Dungeness nuclear power stations.

The loss of the largest local employer would be catastrophic but since then a brief respite has been announced - Dungeness B will now continue to produce power until 2028.



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A nomination form to stand for election to these positions can be obtained from the Returning Officer in the following ways:

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Text: Text 2FT KC and your name and address to 88802  
Post: Electoral Reform Services Limited  
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All nomination papers should be received by the Returning Officer, Ciara Norris, at the address as detailed above, by 5pm on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015.

Should any nominee wish to withdraw their nomination, they must put this in writing to the Returning Officer by 5pm on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> December 2015.

Ballot papers will be distributed to qualifying members on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2016. Completed ballot papers must be received by the Independent Scrutineer by 5pm on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

The regulations governing this election can be obtained from Electoral Reform Services Ltd (address as above).

The Independent Scrutineer for these elections is Electoral Reform Services Ltd (address as above).

The Returning Officer for these elections is Ciara Norris of Electoral Reform Services Ltd (address as above).

North & West

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By that time Romney Tweed should be established as the producers of fashion and furnishing fabrics that attract national and international buyers.

It may not offer quite the same scale of employment opportunity as the power station, but it will offer that much-needed opportunity.

The Romney sheep is a breed that enjoys worldwide recognition. Tough with excellent fertility, it was the foundation stock of sheep farming in many countries around the world.

A tweed business based in Kent will combine the traditional with innovation that will result in provision of

much needed training and job opportunities whilst putting Romney and its sheep back on the international agenda.

Prior to the general election in May, Rural Plc issued its manifesto calling on Government to 'position farming and food at the very top of the agenda'.

Westminster's time has so far been largely dominated by other matters but this is only serving to increase Rural Plc's focus on 'food' and the vastly ranging businesses involved throughout the county in its production and distribution.

George Jessel has spoken to

Conservative MP for Folkestone and Hythe, Damian Collins, and his Tory counterpart in Ashford, Damian Green.

All the directors are similarly lobbying politicians and policy-makers and, if determination and influence count, progress will be made.

In essence – Rural Plc is making the valuable difference that is deserving of the support of everyone in Kent – a county in which everything 'rural' is especially significant.

**RURAL PLC:** From left are Charles Tassell, Mark Lumsdon-Taylor, Mike Bax and George Jessel



## WHAT IS RURAL PLC?

At its heart, Rural Plc (Kent) is an initiative that aims to demonstrate the true value of the rural sector in Kent, increase awareness of the rural sector and drive investment into the sector with strong returns.

Within Kent the farming sector alone is worth £5.4bn, em-

ployes 85,000 people, and, the organisation claims, were it to be viewed as a company, would rank 57th in the FTSE 100. That makes it bigger than Marks & Spencer.

Rural PLC aspires to create a voice and a platform for Kent's food and farming sector.



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**SERIOUS:** Punk band Slaves say they will stop playing if they witness women being groped at their shows

# Slaves hit out on groping at gigs

Molly Kersey-Law on problem at music venues

**M**USIC venues in the county have spoken out in support of punk band Slaves, who recently said they would stop playing if they witnessed any women being groped at their shows.

The Kent-bred duo – made up of Isaac Holman from Tunbridge Wells and Laurie Vincent from Maidstone – made the comments after reports that a woman was touched inappropriately during their gig in Wales.

They took to their Facebook page to say: “Cardiff was an amazing show but it has been tainted for us now after hearing reports of lads groping young girls in the crowd.

“Putting your hands all over any women without her permission is not on at any sort of concert. Going as far as putting your hand up her skirt forcing her to leave the venue and go home, ruining her night, is disgusting. If you are reading this and you were one of the men doing this. You aren’t welcome at our shows.”

Julian Bigg, owner of Ramsgate Music Hall, said: “We absolutely support them threatening to stop because of inappropriate groping going on. It’s not acceptable. The higher the profile of the band the bigger the mouthpiece, and the more people will hear and hopefully take note.”

Jason Dorman volunteers at The Forum, Tunbridge Wells, where the punk duo first met.

He said: “It’s great of Slaves to say something. We back their comments totally. I don’t know of any incidents at The Forum like that.

“It will not be tolerated, certainly not at our venue. Our sound desk is up high, we have a stage manager and barrier staff and security, so if anything happens we are happy to help people.

“I would say 99.9 per cent of the time people respect each other, certainly at more punky shows. I would only assume someone who would do that is not a music fan and isn’t there for the show, so they’re not welcome.”

And many believe this to be a problem that has rumbled on for decades.

“It’s been going back for years – if you look back at the seventies all the way through, with all the horrendous things that are happening with DJs from around that era. People thought they could get away with it. It’s at least deemed unacceptable now,” said Mr Bigg.

Slaves have asked people to support the Girls Against group – made up of five women who formed to tackle the issue.

Group member Anni Cameron said: “As far as we are aware it’s been going on as long as

the guitar-led genres have been around, since the seventies. We’ve spoken to people who said their mums had experienced it.

“It hasn’t seemed to have died out and it goes back generations. I do think there is a mentality of thinking they can get away with it, particularly in a rowdier crowd.

“People are pushed up against each other anyway so they try and pass it off as nothing, but when you’re in that situation it’s obvious that it’s something a bit more malicious. There’s also so many people and the crowd is moving about, so it’s hard to always pinpoint people who are harassing women.”

Lauren Holmes, who lives near Hawkinge, regularly attends gigs and agrees the issue of harassment needs to be addressed.

“At a gig, it becomes even easier to harass somebody. You’re in a crowded, dark space, everyone around you is enjoying the music and isn’t paying attention. It’s an issue which needs to keep being talked about. It’s not funny, a compliment, or a moment of fun, it’s abuse,” she said.

So what should women do if this happens to them?

Girls’ Against’s Ms Cameron said: “If you’re surrounded by people you trust let one of them know so they can try and look out for you. If that’s not working go to security and if that’s not working then just remove yourself from the situation. It might feel like you’re missing out on the gig and that might be the last thing you want to do but your safety should be the priority, if that relies on you physically getting away from the situation then you’re going to be glad for doing that in the long run.”

A spokesperson from the Assembly Hall Theatre, where Slaves are due to perform on December 18, added: “Anyone at the gig who has any concerns should speak to a member of staff or security.”

Detective Chief Inspector Pam Flight, from Kent Police, said any reports to them will be dealt with seriously.

“Touching someone inappropriately is not acceptable, it’s a crime,” she said.

“Sexual assault is a serious offence, it’s not funny and someone being drunk and in a crowded area is not a good enough excuse.

“If you behave in such a way, expect to be arrested and put before the court.

“There is support available for those who fall victim to sexual offences and they will be taken seriously and treated with respect when reporting incidents to us.”

## Major changes to trains this Christmas 24 December – 3 January

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# Did general spark germ warfare?

**Chris Murphy** takes a look back into the murky past of one of the county's military figures who was a key player in commanding British forces but whose reputation has subsequently become tainted

**A** DECORATED Army general who was born and died in the county may also lay claim to the chilling title of the father of germ warfare.

Lord Jeffery Amherst was born in Riverhead, Sevenoaks, in January 1717. The son of a rich barrister, he had a meteoric military career rumoured to have started when he was just 14.

He went on to become Commander-in-Chief of the British forces and regarded as a hero in 1764 when he came home victorious in the North American campaign against the French, a conflict often referred to as the Seven Years War.

His lasting legacy is Montreal Park in Sevenoaks, where, following his victory in that conflict, he returned home to wall off 200 acres of common land with Kentish ragstone and build himself a mansion. It hit financial trouble in the late 19th century and was demolished in 1936 before a housing estate was erected in its place during the 1950s.

But it was an incident just after the Seven Years War for which he may end up being best remembered.

In the midst of a battle in the Great Lakes area of north America, called Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763, it is widely claimed he instructed one of his officers to infect blankets with smallpox and then give them as a present to the native 'Indians'.

Pontiac was the leader of the native Ottawa tribe.

The chief was unhappy with the way General Amherst, who was representing British rule, was commanding the region. In a wave of deadly attacks, the natives destroyed eight forts and killed or captured hundreds of civilians.

It sparked a period of unrest which would last for two years until a peace treaty was finally negotiated.

But the smallpox allegations emerged in letters between Amherst and one of his officers, Colonel Henry Bouquet.



**TYRANT?** Lord Amherst

The word "inoculate" was used, but according to definitions, this means to introduce an infective agent into an organism, as well as today's more accepted 'to protect against infection'.

After Amherst sent a letter to the colonel, he responded to the apparent suggestion saying "PS I will try to inoculate the Indians by means of blankets that may fall in their hands, taking care however not to get the disease myself. As it is pity to oppose good men against them, I wish we could make use of the Spaniard's method, and hunt them with English dogs. Supported by rangers, and some light horse, who would I think effectively extirpate or remove that vermin."

Amherst replied in another letter with: "PS You will do well to try to inoculate the Indians by means of blankets, as well as to try every other method that can serve to extirpate this execrable race."

Whether this plan was ever put into action is never made clear leaving historians wondering about the truth.

But to voice the idea of infecting something with a disease to pass on to an enemy does remain possibly the earliest mention of what would eventually become known as germ warfare.

Dr Keith McLay, dean of the faculty of arts and humanities at Christ Church University in Canterbury, has studied this era.

He told us: "There is some evidence of the smallpox plan from various quotations and correspondence. But equally, there is a debate there as to

whether it ever took place. Did Bouquet ever deploy the order, for a start, and whether it would have been effective and any way shape or form.

"Then there is a debate over whether it is as sensational as one might think because Europeans had been going out to new territories and taking germs with them.

"If you think about intent, then there may be something to it but I don't think you can call it biological warfare. But to even voice it is fascinating."

Dr McLay confirmed claims Amherst could be somewhat of a tyrant.

He said: "Yes, there is that argument, absolutely. Clearly, he had stunning success in the Seven Years War. The British government had tried various generals to capture Canada from France. And it was only through Amherst that they were successful. He also had previous success at the Siege of Louisbourg and Montreal as well.

"He had demonstrated during the Seven Years War incredible generalship. He himself was a pretty prepossessing figure and yes, I am sure he was pretty ruthless too. He gained that reputation through his actions to the Pontiac Rebellion when Amherst felt the Indians had breached agreements."

It was known Amherst favoured "punishment" for dissent rather than bribery with supplies to keep natives quiet.

Dr McLay said: "Ultimately he was recalled and removed from command in America so perhaps there was a recognising that his actions there were counterproductive. But he was promoted on his return to a higher rank.

"He was a hugely successful general, but one whose reputation is clouded by various actions and ongoing debate about his conduct."

He died at his home in Sevenoaks on August 3, 1797.

His name lives on, however, with a number of venues, including schools, named after him in and around his home town.



**PAST:** Lord Amherst's Sevenoaks mansion as it appeared in the late 1700s, left, and the native tribes which rose up to take on the British general in north America



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KOS/15





**TITAN:** The £7m vessel was officially launched on Thursday

# Making waves with £7m Thames vessel to keep our channels clear

Owned by the Port of London Authority, London Titan will help keep our busiest inland waterway clear

**W**ITH Thames passenger and freight figures at record levels, the Gravesend-based Port of London Authority (PLA) officially launched its £7million multi-purpose river maintenance vessel, London Titan, in a ceremony at Tower Pier on Thursday.

Officially named by Thurrock MP, Jackie Doyle-Price, London Titan will work to keep the river clear of obstructions and ensure that channels are clearly marked for all to use.

As the statutory harbour authority, the PLA makes sure the Thames is safe, and promotes the use of the river with the aim of making its activities even busier, to drive more money into the economy.

The vessel has been specially built to be capable of working across the 95 miles that the PLA is responsible for: from Richmond in west London all the way out into the Thames estuary, passing areas of Kent in the process.

Her work is vital on a river that is home to the UK's second biggest port, busiest inland waterway for passengers and freight and a centre for sporting and recreational activity.

At Thursday's event was the shipping minister, Robert Goodwill, who said: "Britain has a proud maritime history and this investment by the Port of London Authority will help ensure the sector continues to thrive."

"The government is doing everything possible to back this industry as

part of its long-term economic plan to create jobs and growth.

"The River Thames is enjoyed by Londoners and visitors to the capital. The London Titan will help it continue to meet the needs of the growing number of businesses and passengers who rely on it all year round."

London Titan is the PLA's biggest single investment in more than 20 years, and was designed by naval architects MacDuff Ship Design, working with marine engineers, masters and crews.

She was built at Manor Marine's shipyard in Portlaine, Dorset, to Lloyd's Register class.

The PLA maintains essential infrastructure across the river to keep traffic flowing.

CEO Robin Mortimer told KoS: "A huge range of goods and building materials from around the world arrive at the port and the increase in growth of the port adds a lot to the economy."

"Some 43,000 jobs are associated with the port, it's currently worth £6.5billion and brings in £2.5bn of tourism, and that will be increased by the Paramount Park development."

"In order to bring trade into the port, we need a working river and to keep the channels clear."

"But the river is a very challenging environment, you get high winds and choppy waters and you need a vessel that can handle a number of different conditions."

"The Titan has a crane to lift things out of the water, such as small sunk-

**“Titan has a crane to lift things out of the water, such as small sunken boats or cars – you’ll be surprised by how much ends up in the Thames...”**

**Robin Mortimer,**  
Port of London Authority CEO

en boats or cars, because you'll be surprised by how much ends up in the Thames.

"That crane has a reach of 20 metres and can lift 25 tonnes, so if a double-decker bus was to end up in the river, the Titan could pull it out."

"To try and lift something of that size, the boat has to be correctly designed so that it remains stable throughout and we're delighted with the results."

To meet very specific requirements, the Titan had to be built from scratch, so that she was small and shallow enough to negotiate bridges in the capital as far upriver as Richmond, but robust enough to operate in the outer estuary.

Director for marine services Peter Steen said: "Most of the crews that worked on her come from Kent and they have all done a fantastic job."

"It's very unusual to find such quality and this is a real British

success story. The time was right because in our fleet of vessels some of them are nearly 40 years old, so now is the opportunity for the Titan to step up and be here for 40 years itself."

"It's a mooring maintenance vessel, so large crew ships will come up and we can hold them in the middle of the river by tying them to buoys, which are held together by a massive chain and anchor below the surface, put in place by the Titan."

"It also has really good environmental value in terms of controlling pollution and the oil recovery equipment it has on board so there really are a number of benefits to this investment."

"More trade is coming in and there's more investment in new terminals, everything is moving quickly."

"Everyone is chuffed to officially launch the Titan and keen to get on to do some work now."

The navigation buoys are crucial for telling ships how deep the water is, and indicating areas of the river to avoid.

Skipper Chris Bright, who has worked on the Thames in various roles for 49 years, added: "In my time on the river I've done watermanship, survey work, salvage work, just about every job that the Titan tackles."

"We've been there from day one, so we saw them first deliver the steel and have watched it progress over time to the launch which was tremendous."

"It has three engines which can all operate independently, the technolo-

gy on board is second to none and the way it handles and manoeuvres is fantastic."

"It's a privilege and an honour to take charge of such a vessel."

Among the new technology on board is electronic charting, described as "GPS for boats," thus replacing the former paper system.

Ms Doyle-Price was given the honour of naming the boat prior to the event.

She said: "The Thames plays a vital role in the Thurrock economy, so naming this boat, which keeps the river safe and open for business, is fantastic."

"Many people forget that the Thames is a major shipping channel. Thurrock is home to the major operations at the Port of Tilbury, Cobelfret and Vopak."

"In fact, more cargo is landed at the terminals in Thurrock than comes in via Felixstowe or Dover."

"The PLA investment in London Titan underpins operators' confidence to invest, generating jobs and growth and underlines that fact that the Port of London remains a key part of the economic infrastructure of London and the south east."

Recent Thames investments include two new MBNA Thames Clippers ferries, a new pier at Plantation Wharf, Battersea and an extension to Banksia pier.

Downriver, developments continue at the Port of Tilbury's London Distribution Park and at London Gateway Port, where a new third berth is being built.



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**COLOURFUL:** This year's production is of timeless classic Snow White

# Review: Is Snow White another big panto hit?

It's that time again... oh no it isn't... oh yes it is... **Chris Britcher** heads to Canterbury's Marlowe Theatre for its panto Snow White & The Seven Dwarfs

**E**VERY year, the Marlowe Theatre's pantomime seems to take a slightly different path towards bringing the house down.

There are the productions which are heavy on slapstick, the big set

piece, or simply the budget splashed on the famous faces.

Or then there's this year's effort – Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs.

This year has put song and dance centre stage and it is all the better for it.

Because it creates a sense of real production and polish that the organised chaos of a pantomime can so easily relinquish.

The choreography is tight, the number of performers for each routine are kept under control – in the past they have perhaps been a little over ambitious on occasions – and all have clearly been drilled to perfection.

By the time a quite jaw-dropping rollerskating element is added (yes, roller skating, but don't let that put you off, it is so dramatic, the entire theatre could be heard holding its breath) and for sheer production values alone, it is a delight for the senses.

This is live, vibrant, theatre at its cross-demographic appeal best.

But fret not if that's not what you buy your ticket for.

Snow White and the Seven



**TICKETS:** Snow White runs at the Marlowe until January 10. For details of how to book, log on to [www.marlowetheatre.com](http://www.marlowetheatre.com) or telephone the box office direct on 01227 787787.

Dwarfs is not short on gags, or silliness, or set pieces. Slapstick has definitely been scaled down, but you don't miss it until you walk out and realise it was putting its feet up this Christmas season.

The set pieces are magnificent too – the legendary ghost bench routine is given a modern overhaul with a 3D screen behind it which should remind all movie producers what makes the technology such an inventive and interactive platform; namely the ability to make the audience react in dramatic style. I won't spoil it, but it works a treat. Improves a familiar favourite, in fact.

What's more, if you can work out before you enter the theatre just how one of the main characters ends up performing amid a sea of Freddie Mercury look-alikes, complete with moustache and big teeth, then your imagination needs both a pat on the back and a stern talking to.

As for the cast, just for once, it is easy to care for the 'straight' roles – in this case Snow White (Katie Monks) and Prince Charming (Ben Carruthers). In years gone by these roles strug-

gle against the glorious silliness of the pantomime world, but here the focus on the production numbers draws them into our collective consciousness.

EastEnders' Rita Simons as Queen Ivannah puts in a solid performance as Snow White's evil step-mother and the seven short actors who portray the dwarfs steal all the scenes they appear in.

But, it is the trio of CBBC's Mr Maker Phil Gallagher (Muddles), Lloyd Hollett (Herman the Henchman) and Ben Roddy (Nurse Nellie) who are worthy of the highest praise.

They drive the whole production along and, having performed together for the past few years, have an easy-going rapport which comes across to the audience.

There is, in truth, a danger this particular combination is approaching the end of its 'best-by' date (not because it's getting stale, but merely in order to freshen things up a little), but they are still the beating heart of this production.

Roddy, in particular, dictates the pace in a variety of different outfits which underline how it is

he – and no-one of wider fame – who is the star of the show.

Is it worth spending your hard-earned money on this Christmas? Of course it is.

To an extent the Marlowe panto has become a victim of its own success: it is always a riot of colour, song and dance. Even when it doesn't quite hit the mark, it still delivers a production of the highest quality.

This is no different. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs is fun-packed from start to finish with some fabulous set-pieces and all designed to put a great big smile on your face.

Treat yourself to it – you will not be disappointed.







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**FESTIVE:** Gemma Merna and Kavana will perform a number of Christmas songs. Credit: Eric Richmond

## Hollyoaks star on stage in a new Christmas production

Hollyoaks star Gemma Merna spoke to **Molly Kersey-Law** about the new show

**H**OLLYOAKS favourite Gemma Merna and 90s singer Kavana will be bringing a number of festive tunes to Folkestone next month.

The pair will be starring in *This Is Christmas*, a musical show featuring songs such as *White Christmas*, *Let It Snow*, *Fairytale of New York* and *Last Christmas*.

It will be performed at the Leas Cliff Hall on December 19, as part of its 16-date tour.

Ms Merna is looking forward to the performance, which she says will help to get audiences into the Christmas spirit.

She said: "It's a new concept for Christmas shows, it's not a panto, it's a Christmas concert and it's all feel-good Christmas songs that we perform on stage.

"There's a little bit of acting in it,

a bit of dancing and a live band.

"It's bringing all the songs back to their original arrangement.

"My favourite part is towards the end of the show, the party section, with songs like *Merry Christmas Everybody*.

"I get a bit too excited, I love that little section.

"I love to dance around and get people's energy up.

"It's great for everybody from every age group and it's just getting into the Christmas spirit."

Ms Merna is well-known for her role as Carmel McQueen in Channel 4 soap *Hollyoaks*, which she had for eight years.

She joined the show in 2006 and won best comedy performance at the British Soap Awards the following year.

While her character was initially comedic, she also had a number of

dramatic storylines throughout the course of the show - such as receiving facial injuries after an accident with a tanning machine and her on-screen husband being shot at their wedding.

Ms Merna left the show after her character died in an explosive train accident in 2014.

So how has the transition from screen to stage been?

"When I was younger I started off in theatre.

"It's getting back to where I used to be," she explained.

"I wanted to try something like this to see if I still enjoyed it as much as I did when I was younger.

"It took me a while to get used to it again.

"It is different to TV, you work with the audience rather than being on screen."

The performance will mark the

first time that the star has been to Kent, and she is looking forward to paying a visit to the county with her co-stars.

"We are very excited, it's great we can go to all these different places," she said.

"We have been rehearsing so much without an audience, so it will be great to get them in front of us," she added.

Ms Merna will be joined on stage by 90s star Kavana, who is famous for his hits including *I Can Make You Feel Good* and *Will You Wait For Me*.

So *This Is Christmas* will be starting at 7.30pm.

Tickets to the performance range from £18.90 to £31.40.

For more information about the show, or to book tickets to the performance, you can visit [www.attickets.com/folkestone](http://www.attickets.com/folkestone).

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# Ramblin' Man returns to Mote Park after a first year triumph

by Molly Kersey-Law

molly.kersey-law@archant.co.uk

**F**OLLOWING a successful inaugural year, the Ramblin' Man Fair will be returning to Maidstone in 2016.

The festival was held at Mote Park in July this year - featuring acts such as Gregg Allman, The Scorpions, Seasick Steve and Ian Anderson.

Early bird tickets to next year's event are now available, with weekend general admission tickets priced at £115 and weekend VIP tickets for £210.

As well as this, anyone purchasing early bird tickets can claim a free t-shirt from the Ramblin' Man website.

The festival is now under the ownership of music event company Spirit of Rock.

Spirit Of Rock released a statement which said: "Now under new management, year two of Ramblin' Man Fair will be even bigger and better than year one."

"Ramblin' Man Fair will come with a new emphasis on great food, fine bourbons and the colourful world of rock culture."



**SUCCESS:** Organisers promise year two will be 'bigger and better'.

PICTURE: Oliver Halfin

Spirit Of Rock director Chris Ingham added: "Ramblin Man 2016 is my first venture with the Spirit of Rock, the company I formed in partnership with RFS entertainment after twenty years at Classic Rock and Metal Hammer magazines and latterly, with TeamRock."

"I actually attended the 2015 concert in Mote Park and I was hugely impressed not only by the diversity of the artists but also the

great atmosphere and the sheer potential of the brand.

"It's time to create a music festival that appeals as much to the foodie as it does the rock music fan in us all."

"Let's have classic rock, southern rock, prog, blues and country music stages alongside great outdoor barbecue food, fine bourbon whiskies and barrels of real ale in the heart of Maidstone's

beautiful Mote Park.

"Knowing whom we have booked to play and alongside these new areas Ramblin' Man 2016 will be a very special weekend indeed, don't miss out."

Ramblin' Man Fair will be taking place from July 23 to 24 2016.

For more details and to see upcoming festival announcements you can visit [www.ramblinman-fair.com](http://www.ramblinman-fair.com).

## Brian Cox live in Margate

PROFESSOR Brian Cox will be bringing his live stage show to the Theatre Royal Margate on November 5 2016 at 7.30pm.

Tickets range from £30 to £40. To book, visit [www.theatreroyalmargate.com](http://www.theatreroyalmargate.com).



## Dartford carol concert

DARTFORD'S annual carol concert will be taking place on December 16 at the Bandstand in Central Park.

It will last from 6.30pm to 8pm.

Tickets are free for Dartford residents and they are available to book now. For more details, visit [www.dartford.gov.uk](http://www.dartford.gov.uk).

## Rose-Marie will perform

IRISH singing star Rose-Marie will be bringing her new show to the Orchard Theatre, Dartford, on February 7, 2016, at 7.30pm.

To book, visit [www.orchardtheatre.co.uk](http://www.orchardtheatre.co.uk).



## Opera Carmen in Bromley

OPERA Carmen will be performed at the Churchill Theatre, Bromley, next year.

The Ellen Kent production will be on stage on April 5 at 7.30pm.

It features George Bizet's musical score.

To book tickets to the show, visit [www.atgtickets.com/bromley](http://www.atgtickets.com/bromley).

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## Fotheringay gig in Ashford

FOLK band Fotheringay will be performing at St Mary's Church, Ashford, on December 11 at 7.45pm.

Tickets range from £22 to £25 and will be available to buy on the door.



## The Kooks take to stage

INDIE rock band The Kooks will be performing at the Leas Cliff Hall, Folkestone, on December 14.

The performance will be starting at 7pm and tickets are £26.15.

For more information, or to book, visit [www.atgtickets.com/folkestone](http://www.atgtickets.com/folkestone).

## New show in Margate

SHOW Hiraeth will be performed at the Theatre Royal Margate on February 23, 2016.

The performance will be starting at 7.30pm.

To book, visit [www.theatre-royalmargate.com](http://www.theatre-royalmargate.com).



## A night of Dirty Dancing

A Night Of Dirty Dancing will be performed at the Woodville, Gravesend, next year.

The show will be on stage on June 15 at 7.30pm.

Tickets range from £19 to £21.

For more information, or to book, visit [www.woodville.co.uk](http://www.woodville.co.uk).

# Long-running show 39 Steps due in Dartford

By Molly Kersey-Law

[molly.kersley-law@archant.co.uk](mailto:molly.kersley-law@archant.co.uk)

LONG-RUNNING West End show, The 39 Steps, will be making its way to Dartford as part of its tour of the UK.

The tour will be marking the Olivier award-winning play's 10th anniversary.

The show is based on John Buchan's 1914 spy thriller and it was adapted for the stage by Patrick Barlow.

It was also adapted for the screen by Alfred Hitchcock in 1935, and a number of scenes from the film have been used in the stage version - such as the chase on the Flying Scotsman train, the escape of the Forth Road Bridge and the controversial 'stocking and suspenders' scene.

The 39 Steps will be performed on stage at the Orchard Theatre from February 1 to 6 next year.

The production follows the story of charming hero Richard Hannay, with his stiff upper lip, pencil moustache and British gung-ho attitude.

He becomes embroiled in a dangerous game of cat and mouse,



which stretches from London to the Scottish Highlands.

The comedy production features four actors - who will be playing more than 130 different characters in 100 minutes.

Richard Ede will be taking on the role of Richard Hannay and Olivia Greene will be playing the three women in his life - Pamela, Annabella and Margaret.

Taking on the myriad of other roles throughout the production will be Andrew Hodges and Rob Witcomb.

Mr Ede's previous theatre credits include playing Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing, George Bailey in It's A Wonderful Life and Petruchio in The Taming of the Shrew.

Ms Greene has previously starred as Dorothy Brock in 42nd Street and Eva in Kindertransport.

For more information about the performance or to book tickets to the show you can visit [www.orchardtheatre.co.uk](http://www.orchardtheatre.co.uk).

Alternatively you can call the ticket office on 01322 220000.

**CHARMING:** Richard Ede and Olivia Greene will star



**ADAPTATION:** Scenes from the 1935 film will be featured

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# James Martin keeping it sweet with new book

The TV presenter and chef's cook book features more than 70 recipes for people with a sweet tooth...

**T**V presenter, restaurateur, bestselling chef and one-time Strictly semi-finalist, blue-eyed-boy James Martin certainly doesn't do things by halves - and the tradition continues with his latest cookery book, *Sweet*.

Following on from 2007's hugely popular *Desserts*, *Sweet* looks set to re-establish Mr Martin as the king of puddings, with over 70 recipes, from simple classic bakes and family favourites, to lavish showstoppers and - wait for it - an all-important troubleshooting section (Hallelujah!).

"People always say, 'I do this but this always goes wrong', and the first thing I would say is buy quality ingredients. It can only be you or the ingre-

dients that are the problem, so if it's the ingredients, change it," he said.

The glossy shots in the book certainly look appealing.

"We used the same photographer this time around, a guy called Peter Cassidy who shoots everything pin-sharp, rather than all that modern, blurry b\*\*\*\*\*ks. If you're going to do a step-by-step, the reader has got to see what it looks like," states the chef.

With a culinary career that spans two decades, perfectionist Mr Martin has a finger in many pies - but it was his stint on Strictly Come Dancing in 2005 that landed him his biggest gig to date, as host of BBC One's Saturday Kitchen.

And despite 10 years of 4am starts and 6am rehearsals ("I have a big can



**SWEET:** James Martin's book follows on from *Desserts*

of Red Bull and two eye drops before I go live"), his passion for the weekend show remains.

"I love it and everything it represents. You're giving chefs that hardly ever cook on TV the opportunity to show their restaurant and skill-set off. Their reputation is on the line, so it's a huge pressure for them.

"Me? I've got the best seat in the world, as I get to be a commis chef in the best restaurants in the world without having to go to them."

While Mr Martin is happy to be ogled on screen, he's equally content cooking undercover in his popular restaurant, James Martin Manchester, and has no qualms admitting he would happily revert back to the role should his fame game be up.

"The public will make its own decision, and that's it. If they stop watching me, I'm quite happy to go back home and carry on working, because I've had a whale of a time for the last 20 years. I feel very privileged to do it, but when your time's up, your time's up," he said.

"Food has been at the start and it will be at the end - the bit in the middle is all fluffy clouds, but it's all that fluffy stuff that people enjoy."

He insists he's not hugely ambitious, though.

"My glass has been full for quite a number of years and I'm very happy.

I don't want to reach for a bigger one; I think you get to a certain age in life where you're content and it's a good place to be."

## Trolls of Winter's story

**FAMILY** show Santa's Little Trolls will be performed at the Folkestone Quarterhouse from December 19 to 24.

The show is presented by theatre company Pickled Image, and it tells the story of the Trolls of Winter - who are tired of never getting any credit for organising Christmas.

The performance will start at 11am.

For more details, or to book tickets, call the box office on 01303 760750.

## Mark Watson on stage

**COMEDIAN** Mark Watson will be on stage at the Hazlitt Theatre, Maidstone. He will bring his new show, *I'm Not Here*, to the theatre on June 12, 2016.

Mr Watson has appeared on TV shows including *Mock The Week*, *Have I Got News For You* and *Live At The Apollo*.

Tickets to the show are £18.50.

For more information, or to book, visit [www.parkwoodtheatres.co.uk](http://www.parkwoodtheatres.co.uk).

## The Nutcracker ballet

**CLASSIC** ballet *The Nutcracker* will be performed at the Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury, from December 28 to January 3, 2016.

The show follows Clara and the Nutcracker Prince as they make a magical journey and meet the Mouse King and Sugar Plum Fairy.

Tickets are £8.50.

Visit [www.marlowetheatre.com](http://www.marlowetheatre.com) to book tickets to one of the performances.

## Musical Bugsy Malone

**MUSICAL** *Bugsy Malone* will be coming to Central Theatre, Chatham, from April 14 to 16 next year.

Set in 1920s New York, it tells the story of two rival gangsters - Fat Sam and Dandy Dan.

Performances will be taking place at 2.30pm and 7.30pm. Tickets range from £14 to £16. For details, you can visit [www.tickets.midway.gov.uk](http://www.tickets.midway.gov.uk).



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# Frozen planet in Star Wars movies

## TRAVEL REVIEW: Iceland

by David Wilcock

**B**LEAK and inhospitable. Hoth, the frozen planet featured in *The Empire Strikes Back*, wouldn't be an obvious holiday choice.

But fans of cult film franchise *Star Wars* can travel to a place with ice, glaciers and mountains, which is a lot more picturesque.

Iceland has starred in several big screen blockbusters, the latest being the seventh *Star Wars* film, *The Force Awakens*, and is the perfect option for anyone seeking a sci-fi winter break.

I start my other-worldly weekend adventure in capital city Reykjavik, but it's the rugged landscapes outside the city limits I'm eager to explore.

Iceland is a place that's been shaped by ferocious geological processes and the sharp teeth of Arctic weather for tens of thousands of years. Striking features include glaciers, volcanoes and hot springs.

My first stop is Soheimajokull glacier, a 90-minute drive south and east from the city, along the island's long-distance main ring road.

It is not far from Svinafellsjokull glacier, which doubled for the Himalayas in *Batman Begins* and the land North of the Wall in *Game of Thrones*.

It is also a sight of a changing environment. Our guide from Reykjavik Excursions - [www.re.is](http://www.re.is) - tells us that 20 years ago, you could step from the car park onto the ice. Now, it's a long uphill walk to the edge of the glacier.

If you're picturing glistening, pristine, blue-tinted ice, you might be disappointed. The 2010 eruption of the Eyjafjallajokull volcano - which disrupted so much air travel - coated the glacier in fine volcanic ash, so now it looks a bit more like a coal mine.

We strap on our crampons, hoist



**GLACIERS:** Iceland has been shaped by 'ferocious geological processes'

our ice axes and spend several glorious hours exploring the ice, keeping a safe distance from any dangerous crevasses.

As well as glaciers, Iceland has some pretty epic waterfalls. Our route back from Soheimajokull takes us past Skogafoss and Seljalandsfoss.

The latter has a walkway winding behind the thundering torrent - just be prepared to get a bit wet!

No less damp are Iceland's lava

tunnels. These burrows are formed when lava flowing from volcanic eruptions cools and solidifies, and the hot magma runs away.

I don a hardhat and head torch, and follow our dry-humoured guide, Kommi, from Iceland Expeditions - [www.icelandexpeditions.is](http://www.icelandexpeditions.is) - into the darkness. At times, we have to crawl on all fours and occasionally even wriggle along on our stomachs.

If this sounds like a bit too much ef-

fort, there are ways to have a good time if you are a bit more C-3PO than Chewbacca.

Reykjavik is a small but superb city, featuring a long sweeping waterfront and a striking 1930s concrete cathedral, Hallgrímskirkja, where the views from the top of its tower are worth the hike.

Other city attractions include a museum on whales, a chance to see the Northern Lights and, bizarrely,

## TRAVEL FACTS

DAVID Wilcock was a guest of Wow Air.

Flights from London Gatwick to Reykjavik operate up to twice daily.

Prices start at £49 per person.

This price includes taxes and hand luggage allowance.

For more information about flights on offer you can visit Wow Air's website at [www.wowair.com](http://www.wowair.com).

the Penis Museum.

I stay at the 4-star Fosshotel Reykjavik, which opened this year and is the largest hotel in Iceland.

I spend a good few hours in the property's excellent beer bar called the Björ Gardurinn. It has a varied and long drink list, with many Icelandic beers to try - although the cheapest will set you back £5 and others can cost £12 each.

Of course, a long weekend break in Iceland involves much more than just drinking. Pampering is also important in this Nordic country. This is where the famous Blue Lagoon ([www.bluelagoon.com](http://www.bluelagoon.com)) comes in handy.

Located on the road between Reykjavik and Keflavik Airport, its milky blue, geothermal, silica-rich waters (heated between 36-40C) provide instant relaxation. It even has a swim-up bar - although there's a three-drink maximum rule, to avoid drunkenness.

I go there after dark, in the hope of glimpsing the aurora. Lying back in the warm water, I look up to see brilliant stars illuminating the clear sky.

It's unlikely I'll ever have a chance to enjoy space travel, but with the alien landscapes of Iceland on my doorstep, there's really no need to jet off to a galaxy so far, far away.

## Film Reviews by Damon Smith



### THE NIGHT BEFORE (15/101 mins) Comedy/Romance

SANTA Claus narrates the sorry tale of Ethan Miller, Isaac Greenberg and Chris Roberts, who have spent Christmas Eve together since 2001, when Ethan became an orphan.

Fourteen years later, the men

have grown apart and realise that they must bid farewell to festive tradition.

Chris is a superstar American football player, who secretly injects steroids to compete with teammates including star quarterback Tommy Owens. Isaac has an adoring wife, Betsy, who couldn't be more proud of his transition from goofball to expectant father.

As for Ethan, he has recently split from long-term girlfriend Diana because he refused to commit.

He now realises that he wants Diana back, but she is footloose and fancy free, flanked by best friend Sarah.

The lads go out in a blaze of glory by attending the most exclusive party in New York, armed with pot procured from avuncular local dealer Mr Green.

Needless to say, the festivities don't unfold as planned.

### VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN (12A/110 mins) Thriller/Action

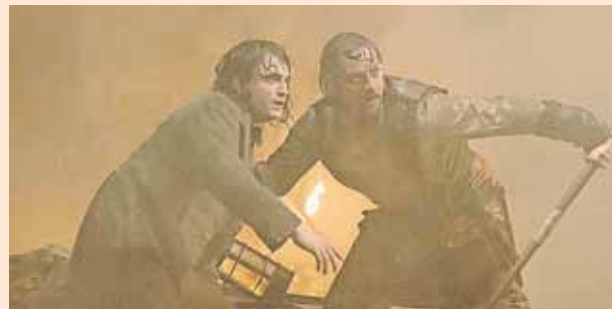
VICTOR Frankenstein is a student at the Royal College Of Medicine with lodgings in the West End.

During a visit to a circus run by sadistic ringmaster Barnaby, Victor encounters a lowly clown with a burning passion for anatomy.

A bond is forged and Victor rescues the clown from his cage and asks the performer to become his assistant under the guise of his morphine-addicted flatmate, Igor Straussman. Together, they blaze a trail in medical science by harnessing the power of electricity to reanimate dead flesh.

Success emboldens Frankenstein and the student dares to create a fully formed being with support from a wealthy patron called Finnegan.

Meanwhile, Igor fans the flames of a fledgling romance with a circus



acrobat Lorelei and God-fearing Inspector Roderick Turpin vows to bring down Victor.

### SUNSET SONG (15/133 mins) Drama

ADAPTED from Lewis Grassic Gibbon's 1932 novel, *Sunset Song* is a handsome period drama set in early 1920s rural Scotland.

John Guthrie presides over his brood with an iron fist and an unwavering religious conviction. He refuses to tolerate any dissent from his wife Jean, son Will or spirited daughter Chris, who hopes to become a teacher.

When Jean dies after giving birth to twins, Chris finds herself in the midst of a brutal war between her father and brother.



**A**S the festive season begins, there's no better time to have a wander in your garden and see what greenery you might be able to use to make your own decorations.

"If you have common plants like holly, cotoneaster, rosemary and ivy, they can all be put to good use in Christmas displays both inside and out," says Emma Hardy, whose book *The Winter Garden* offers a plethora of ideas on creating beautiful displays from garden matter.

"Little pine conifers will be fine to have indoors over Christmas. I bought some *Picea glauca* (white spruce) from Ikea, which are really good for Christmas displays. Look indoors at garden centres and they will have those little conifers."

Add softer greenery like bun moss or even moss from your lawn to add to a trough for the table, including other items such as mind-your-own-business (*Soleirolia soleirolia*) and bead plant (*Nertera granadensis*).

"You can pick moss off the lawn or if you have a lovely bit on the roof of your shed, use that. You may need to mist it a bit to keep it moist."

"Ivy, especially if it has the berries on it, looks great and lasts for ages."

"For a cheap display, consider bulbs. I bought some hyacinths the other day which were 69p each. Get a few of those, pot them up in an old vase with pine cones round them and it makes a special display."

Making holes in the bottom of any



**FESTIVE:** Emma Hardy offers tips on how to make decorations out of garden matter

## Enjoy a natural festive display

trough is essential for drainage, but ensure you put a drip tray underneath or the Christmas table's going to get wet. Add a thick layer of gravel to the bottom of the container, leveling the surface, then half-fill the trough with potting compost before adding your plants.

"If you want a bit of sparkle, put some of those battery-operated fairy

lights around the tree and it's just the sweetest thing," she advises. "You could put pine cones around the base of it, or anything with berries, such as a sprig of holly or snowberries."

Use succulents from an existing rockery to make a fantastic wreath which should look good all year round and can be refreshed and re-used next year too.

Use moss to line a metal wreath frame, pulling the moss into pieces and laying it in a ring shape slightly larger than the wire frame, root side up on the table.

Lay the wire wreath frame on top of the moss and place handfuls of potting compost on the frame, then wrap the moss around the frame and the compost, securing it with copper

wire. This should provide enough nutrients to keep the succulents happy.

When Christmas is over, Hardy hangs her wreath in a sheltered spot on her garden fence near the house.

"Succulents can survive quite dry conditions, so make sure the wreath doesn't become waterlogged. In very dry weather, just moisten the moss and potting compost a little."

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## Uncomfortable use of grammar

ALAN Bainbridge's case against grammar schools (Letters, 29.11) can only be described as losing arguments with himself.

The language used 'uncomfortable truths', 'research has shown', 'historical evidence', 'working class', 'middle and upper class' is highly suspect as he uses it to support his arguments emotionally with no supporting evidence; his case is also weakened when introducing class and politics into an argument which should be based solely on the merits (or otherwise) of selection and social mobility. I suspect some mental scarring here.

Social mobility was alive and well at my grammar school in the 50s; we had more than our fair share of doctors, lawyers, engineers and company directors. The school was situated mid-way between a council estate and a very nice area of privately-owned houses; the 'achievements' mentioned above, of children coming from these areas, were (interestingly) spread equally between them. The only thing that mattered at the school was not 'where you came from, but, 'what you were good at'.

Mr Bainbridge has confused 'equal ability' with 'equal opportunity'.

Recent research (apologies for the language) has shown that intellectual 'ability' is evident at the even younger age of five, never mind 11.

Opportunity should be afforded equally to other children so they can develop their less academic skills and become the next Jamie Oliver, David Beckham or Eric Clapton; this may be key to addressing the stigma sometimes attached to failing the 11-plus.

I do accept that the old selection system wasn't perfect but, we have thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

The argument used that only a tiny percentage of grammar school children obtained two or more A-levels (compared with four to six A-stars now) is fatuous; surely even Mr B recognises that standards have dropped?

Finally, why are we trying to send everybody to university? Do we need to study subjects like nursing, midwifery, TV and media studies at university? Surely these subjects should be addressed by apprentice-type training on the job, in hospitals and newspaper offices. If universities were still the preserve of the academics then we wouldn't have tuition fees, or, graduates filling shelves in supermarkets

**Colin Jeffery,**  
via email

## LETTER OF THE WEEK



## Selection does aid the working classes

ALTHOUGH Alan Bainbridge chooses to doubt the veracity of my statement that the pupils attending my grammar school were of a working class background (Letters, KoS, last week), I can assure him that this was a fact.

In addition, I am aware that this was not exceptional, as the catchment area for my primary school permitted a choice of four local grammar schools and those of my friends and relatives who elected to attend those other than mine, found that the social strata from which their fellow pupils came was exactly the same.

I do not understand the justification for Mr Bainbridge's assertion that testing favours the middle and upper class, as the 11 plus tests academic ability and the potential to benefit from a grammar school education, neither of which is limited to any particular class. In my day, it was also possible for bright children who developed intellectually later

than 11 to win a place at grammar school at 13, something that a number of my fellow pupils succeeded in doing.

Finally Mr Bainbridge's comments on university education ignores the fact that the latter has not only declined in quality during the past few decades, but its ubiquity forces those who, in the past could have obtained worthwhile careers straight from school, now feel it necessary to burden themselves with vast student debts in order to study for degrees, many of which do little to guarantee decent employment. I certainly do not oppose equality of opportunity and it is Mr Bainbridge who, by depriving bright working class children of the best possible education, opens the way for many less able, but wealthier, students from public schools, to gain an unfair advantage.

**Colin Bullen,**  
Tonbridge

## Religion is about relationships

THANK you for the front page and excellent article in Kent on Sunday last weekend (Is it time to suspend religious belief?).

Yes, as a person trying to live my life according to the Bible I get it wrong lots of the time. It's not about religion – it's about relationships.

Religion has always been used as an excuse for war. I was the biggest atheist until I got to 40 and asked a friend, 'what is the meaning of life?'

I attended the local Anglican church and a few months later became a Holy Spirit-filled Christian – born again if you like.

I now have a relationship with God. I now attend a lively Christian church that is struggling to find buildings to accommodate its growing congregations. Religion maybe in decline but relationship is not.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ, can I encourage your readers to go and explore the Christian faith.

God bless you and your readers this Christmas.

**Paul Holdaway,**  
Canterbury

## Schools should go back in time

I'M surprised at all the discussions of whether grammars are good or not for our children – let's face a few facts.

Selection in life is a normal requirement whatever discipline a person goes into. We glorify sportspeople for being successful; many identified as young as seven for their ability. Then we have young musicians being selected for special attention at a young age so I ask what is the difference?

I didn't attend a grammar school but my wife did and her father was a coal lorry delivery man so he was working class. She said it was the best thing that happened to her.

I failed the 11-plus but the school system in those days (the 50s) was such that I could take a 13 plus which I passed and went to a technical school.

Technical schools generally made it that apprenticeships were first class and going to a technical college was considered a good second option if one wasn't as academic as the grammar school intake.

It was the government that through ideology scrapped the system and introduced comprehensive education, which cannot possibly work having every pupil in the same boat whatever their ability, as is now proved because the country doesn't have any experienced trades people.

This would never have happened if technical schools had been kept.

I agree totally with Colin Bullen on polytechnics as these were again a good option for the less academic and should never have been absorbed into the university system.

Let's aspire as a nation to be the best at what we do.

**David Preston,**  
Tonbridge Wells

## Syria: Better we die fighting

I AND the rest of English people should be thankful Jeremy Corbyn was not in power during the war; he would have tried to stop Churchill from bombing Germany because Hitler would attack Britain more.

We are at war with all terrorists no matter where they are. In every war against evil, people get killed. Does Corbyn, and his stupid followers, want to live in fear of dying a gruesome death?

It's better to die fighting than to just wait to be murdered.

**John R O'Neon,**  
Folkestone

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- 5) Have a sense of humour.
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- 8) Highlight topical issues of concern to

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10) Champion causes that it feels are important to the well-being of the county and its people.

**We hope you enjoy Kent on Sunday.**





## Hever Castle

by **Alexandra Belavokaya**

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**DS4:** Now a brand on its own, the new DS4 boasts two variants – one 10mm lower and the Crossback that sits 20mm higher



## DS4 multiplies its options

**FIRST DRIVE:** It could have been a so-so revamp, but the new look DS4 surprises with a new variant and a better drive...

**C**ITROËN'S former DS premium line is breaking away to form a standalone brand – DS plain and simple – and the main event arrives next year with the revamped DS3 supermini.

So, launching the new look midsize DS4 (from £19,495) could easily have been a sideshow, especially after the slow-selling performance of the former Citroën DS4.

And yet, the nascent French brand has pulled off a coup with not one, but two new DS4s, by adding a pump-up crossover variant called the Crossback (from £21,745).

Even more intriguing is that the Crossback isn't so much aimed at new customers, but retaining Citroën DS4 buyers.

These people, DS marketers reckon, liked the old car's high-riding style and want even more of the same, so the Crossback has been jacked up 20mm and given SUV-style wheelarches, bespoke black front and rear spoilers, and grey roof bars.

Meanwhile, the 'standard' DS4 benefits from being lowered 10mm and a more low slung appearance, enhanced by the hidden rear door handles carried over from its Citroën predecessor.

Both variants look classy inside and out, but need to, bearing in mind the DS brand's upmar-



ket aspirations, finally seeking to build on the legacy of the original Citroën 'Dee Ess' launched to such acclaim 60 years ago.

And though the DS4 dashboard is carried over from the Citroën, the newcomer becomes the first vehicle in the Peugeot-Citroën group to offer Apple CarPlay compatibility.

As ever, the Peugeot-Citroën engines – diesel

and petrol – are impressive, but I needed to know most how it rode and drove. The old DS4 chassis shocked Citroën fans with its tautness, and yet it wasn't entertaining to drive either.

Fortunately, the new DS4 is far better: 'Citroënistas' still won't like the ride comfort, but there is more driver feedback and I do like this DS style.

North & West

[kent-life.co.uk](http://kent-life.co.uk) [kentnews.co.uk](http://kentnews.co.uk)



# Plug-in Outlander supercharges Mitsubishi

Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle is a technical tour de force that has powered up Japanese brand's UK presence single handed, writes **Steve Loader...**

**S**ALES of the plug-in hybrid version of the Outlander SUV have electrified Mitsubishi in the UK.

For so long, the Japanese marque relied on the venerable Shogun off-roader and 'Tonka Toy' L200 pick-up, but its registrations have leapt more than 50 per cent each year since the mould-breaking Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle (PHEV) was launched two years ago.

It's not hard to work out why: SUVs are fashionably hot anyway, and the PHEV is aggressively priced from £34,304, despite the expensive petro-electric powertrain.

The ability to top up its battery pack from the mains at your office or home, means it qualifies for a £5,000 Government electric vehicle subsidy so, effectively, costs about the same as an equivalent diesel Outlander.

It also has headline-grabbing figures like an official combined 156.9mpg and CO2 emissions of 48.7g/km, the latter being less than half the level required to qualify for zero road tax, and delivering a company car tax rate of just five per cent - conventional rivals could be hit by 25 per cent or more.

And if you are sceptical about official fuel consumption figures –



and you really should be after recent industry revelations – note that short trips or commuting of around 25 miles between charges will be done mostly on stored electricity.

The PHEV has 200bhp on tap from combining its petrol engine and two electric motors, each system driving

a separate axle, enabling the PHEV to offer 4x4 if necessary.

And there's no congestion charge for London commuters either. You can now see why Mitsubishi is on a bit of a roll.

So what's the catch? Well, the Outlander is a bit of a barge to look at



and drive, despite some styling tweaks earlier this year, introducing LED headlights and daytime running lights, plus new bumpers that make this relatively large car seem to sit lower on the road.

The chassis is set up for comfort rather than entertainment, but this

Mitsubishi Outlander GX4H PHEV	
Price:	from £38,954
Driving appeal:	★★
Image:	★★★★
Space:	★★★★
Value:	★★★★
Running costs:	★★★★
How green?:	★★★★
Best rival:	Volvo XC60

will suit buyers attracted by its impressive people and load-carrying capacity, generous spec, hard-wearing quality trimming, and that 4x4 ability, all of which make it Herculean when considering its modest running costs and tax benefits.

And it's a doddle to drive: a real no-nonsense A to B motor, with seamless automatic gear-shifting. If you crave more driving entertainment, call up the screen telling you which powertrain bits are doing what at any one time.

The electric motors, for instance, can reverse role and become generators powered by the petrol engine, to pump power back into the batteries. The cabin won't win any design awards, but is well-organised and comfortable, particularly over long distances, when the Outlander becomes a refined cruiser even if its economy is challenged.

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Model shown Jeep Renegade 1.4 MultiAir II 140hp Longitude 4x2 Manual at £20,395 OTR. OFFICIAL FUEL CONSUMPTION FIGURES FOR JEEP RENEGADE RANGE MPG (l/100km): EXTRA URBAN 47.9 (5.9) – 70.6 (4.0), URBAN 32.5 (8.7) – 55.4 (5.1), COMBINED 40.9 (6.9) – 64.2 (4.4). CO<sub>2</sub> EMISSIONS: 160 – 115 g/km. Fuel consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> figures are obtained for comparative purposes in accordance with EC directives/regulations and may not be representative of real-life driving conditions. Promotion available on new Renegade models registered between 23rd November and 19th December 2015. \*Savings applied to reduce monthly payments to £169. \*Customer deposit is £3,986. Jeep deposit is £1,500. Total deposit £5,486. Optional final payment £18,272. Contract term is 36 months. Jeep Deposit Contribution only available in conjunction with Jeep Horizon PEP or Jeep Hire Purchase. With Jeep Horizon you have the option to return the vehicle and not pay the final payment, subject to the vehicle not having exceeded an agreed annual mileage (a charge of 6p per mile for exceeding 10,000 miles per annum in this example) and being in good condition. Finance subject to status. Guarantees may be required. Terms and Conditions apply. At participating Dealers only and on selected stock vehicles. Jeep Financial Services, PO BOX 4445, Slough, SL1 0BW. Jeep® is a registered trademark of FCA US LLC.

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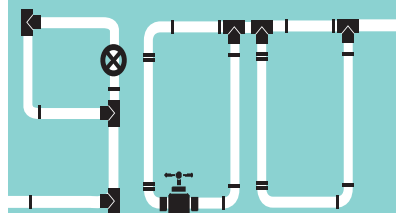
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**EVANS:** Skier has hailed the spirit of Paralympic athletes



# Evans hails spirit of Paralympians

After winning gold at Sochi, the 24-year-old is taking a break

## Skiing

By Tom Pyman

tom.pyman@archant.co.uk

CHATHAM's Charlotte Evans says the support of locals in Kent has inspired her to success.

The skier, 24, won gold at the Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014 as guide for her partially sighted partner, Kelly Gallagher, but is now taking a break from competition.

Speaking at an event at Chatham Ski and Snowboard Centre, Evans told KoS: "I had a really big concus-

sion back in January so had to recover from that and then I felt I needed a new challenge, I had to move away and I've been trying different things. "I'm a Medway girl through and through and I'm really fortunate to have the people of Kent supporting me.

"The first thing I learned about Paralympic support was that these guys have no limits and no boundaries and they've proved that anyone has a chance of success. They're fantastic."

Sports minister and MP for Chatham and Aylesford, Tracey Crouch, also had praise for the attitude of local Paralympic athletes.

She said: "Nobody should be prevented from participating in sport, regardless of the challenges.

"There is something out there for everyone, whether you are disabled or physically able, we need to make sure people are getting involved.

"In terms of winter sport, we have some fantastic facilities here and it's really important to see people like Charlotte and Lizzy Yarnold doing well, because these are people that have grown up on our streets and in our communities and now they are enjoying national and international success.

"I think they are going to inspire a future generation."

## Welling host Carlisle in FA Cup second round

WELLING United are preparing for the biggest game of their season so far as they take on Carlisle United in the second round of the FA Cup.

The visit of the League Two side is expected to create a real buzz around the area, as the Wings look to secure a place in the hat for the third round of the competition, where they will be joined by sides from the Premier League.

Welling's cup journey began with a fourth qualifying round win over Grays Athletic, although a replay was needed to see off the Essex side, before Ricky Wellard and Michael Bakare then struck in a 2-0 win over Barwell in the first round proper.

The competition has provided a little respite from a gruelling league campaign so far, which has seen Loui Fazakerley's side languish near



**WINGS:** Welling United play for a place in the third round on Sunday

the bottom of the table, currently sitting in 19th position, now six games without a league win.

Welling supporter Ben Hopkinson said: "The amount of money this will generate is really important, and will see us through until the end of the season, but the chance to try and cause an upset and draw a Manchester United or a Chelsea in the next round is unbelievable for our little club."

Fellow fan Mark Shuttleworth added: "We've had a tough time in the league but we seem like a team that raises our game against the better opposition so hopefully we'll do that on Sunday."

A bumper crowd is expected at Park View Road as Welling are the only Kent club remaining in the competition, after the likes of Gillingham, Margate and Maidstone United were all eliminated in the last round.

## Sport Shorts

» Email [sports@kosmedia.co.uk](mailto:sports@kosmedia.co.uk) or call Tom Pyman on 01233653477



**LOANS:** Matt Johnson and Sean Shields have joined

## Margate snap up Fleet pair on 5-week loans

MARGATE have announced the loan signings of Ebbsfleet United pair Matt Johnson and Sean Shields.

Johnson, 25, is a box-to-box midfielder who joined Fleet from Bishop's Stortford last season, and went on to make 37 appearances for the current National League South leaders.

Shields, 23, spent eight years at the Tottenham academy before bursting onto the non-league scene with St Albans where he netted 21 goals in 100 appearances.

The winger moved to Dagenham & Redbridge in 2013, but struggled to break into the team and returned to St Albans for a short stint before joining Ebbsfleet United in January 2015.

Both players will be available for selection in Saturday's league clash away at St Albans and will stay with the Blues until January 6, meaning they could play up to five times for the Gate, including a double-header with rivals Maidstone United over the Christmas period.



**SPITFIRE:** The Canterbury ground will host Lions fixtures next summer

## Spitfire Ground to host England Lions

THE Spitfire Ground, St Lawrence in Canterbury is set to host England Lions and England Under 19s fixtures next summer.

England's A side will take on Pakistan A and Sri Lanka A in 50-over matches on July 24-25 before England Under 19s play Sri Lanka U19 in a 50-over ODI on August 16.

Opener Daniel Bell-Drummond, keeper Sam Billings and spinner Adam Riley have played recently for England Lions with 11 current Kent players having played for England

Under 19s.

Bell-Drummond, 22, hit a century against Australia this summer and earned a call-up for a T20 series in Dubai.

The Lewisham-born batsman said: "It's great to see international cricket coming to Canterbury.

"We welcomed both Australia men and women in 2015 and it's nice for our supporters to have a glimpse of the next generation of England players at The Spitfire Ground, St Lawrence, and hopefully a few Kent lads will be involved."

## Stones striker signs new contract

MAIDSTONE United striker Alex Akrofi has signed a new 18-month contract, keeping the 20-year-old at the Gallagher Stadium until the summer of 2017.

Akrofi, who signed from Brentwood Town last October, has made more than 35 appearances for Maidstone and returned to his former side on loan at the end of last

season, scoring a hat-trick in the Ryman North play-off final.

Stones boss Jay Saunders said: "I wanted to get something sorted with Alex and I am delighted he's committed his immediate future to the club.

"He's a big part of our plans and at only 20 years of age, he's someone who'll get better and better."

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